ABOVE THE BATTLES

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BY

C. H. A. ANDRÉ, pseud
André Albret

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY
MRS. PHILIP DUNCAN WILSON

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I

The Bad News

ALL day we have been working hard under the hot, sheet-iron roof of the hangar. To avoid the unbearable glare we have shut the doors and are now working in a heat like that of a furnace, the air saturated with emanations of gasolene and reeking with the persistent odour of "novavia" with which we are doping the surfaces of the plane.

Painfully the hours of greatest heat go by. A crew of Italian mechanicians, half naked, the perspiration streaming down their bodies, is toiling in great haste to mount the new engine. The time is short, for the work must be completed by to-morrow at daybreak.

To-morrow! Suddenly my mind dwells on the thought of that morrow so filled with uncertainty and formidable destiny. At noon the

newspapers which arrived from the town considered war as inevitable although, later, more reassuring news came by telephone.

Now that the sun is sinking I order the doors to be thrown wide open and suddenly we behold the magic beauty of a summer evening in Italy. What grace! What strength! Around us and stretching to the horizon of dim and distant hills are the fields traversed by the straight canals of running water, each etched with its long lines of blackberry bushes. To the north and west, like the stage of a theatre, the fairy-like scenery of the Alps rises against the sky.

This familiar landscape is so serene, this beautiful summer evening is so sweet and soft, so many birds are singing, the green of the shrubbery is so fresh and the flowers by the side of the canal so lovely that my mind cannot dwell on the horror of a coming war or believe such a thing possible. And in spite of the foreign voices around me, in spite of the strange rhythm of the harvester's songs, I do not experience that impression of exile, of homesickness—usually so strong during the hours of crisis.

A softer and more meditative quiet envelops us with the falling twilight. The birds have stopped their song and the only noises now are

the intermittent burr of an engine from the direction of the military hangars and the songs of the harvesters from the road.

The mechanicians—tired out, dirty, covered with oil and perspiration—have come to the door where they expose their naked chests to the evening breeze. After the concentrated heat of the inside and its strong odours of gasolene and varnish they inhale with delight the fragrance of the trees and the freshness which comes from the earth and the running water.

I allow them to rest because they are tired and also because I am waiting for their chief, my friend C——, the engineer who has gone to the neighbouring town for news. If we are going to have war what is the use of hurrying with this work which has become useless?—I shall have to say good-bye to my airplanes and leave at once for my threatened country.

As the moments go by it becomes harder to wait; a dark presentiment at times throws a shadow on my meditation; and then, unconsciously, the view of nature at rest and all the earthly joys spread before me causes hope to revive once more.

To find justification for this instinctive optimism I move off toward the telephone hoping

to obtain some news although the military authorities to whom it belongs are particularly discreet on the subject of foreign politics.

Following the path which runs by the side of the barracks I meet a crew of German mechanicians who have left the hangar where they are assembling an Aviatik. As they go by me they sing. I cannot understand the words but the tune is aggressive and savage; they thrust it in my face with a challenging expression very different from their usual obsequious servility. They look sullen and menacing and suddenly I feel a great repulsion toward these men whom yesterday I passed with indifference. They seem distant and strange. With their ill-concealed anger they are like rebellious dogs. I am surprised and pained by the idea that they are of a hostile race.

A motorcycle approaches; before reaching me it passes through the sullen group like a projectile and the Germans run to right and left with furious protestations. I recognize my friend C—— who, unable to stop at once on account of his speed, makes as he passes a gesture of uncertainty: "Nothing!"

In spite of myself I feel relieved because those Boches with their savage song had revived my dark presentiments. Not that I am afraid of

ot love it in spite of all its glamour
nture. And also I feel that it is
—that we are not prepared for the
fight; so many works are on the way,
lans are nearly ripe; with a little more
would be complete! At the bottom
heart I cannot believe that aggression,
tion, and butchery—which constitute
n war—can be practised against one an-
by the most civilized countries of the
d. . . .

Turning brusquely, my friend has come back
ar me. He stops his motorcycle and still in
he saddle exclaims:

"No news particularly alarming. The delay has been prolonged and this may calm the storm. He adds, however, that although there are no official bulletins, a travelling commercial agent has told him that the frontier was closed at Modane and mobilization on the point of being declared in France. . . . As far as he is concerned my friend does not believe these rumours and thinks we must finish our work on the airplane in order to be able to try it at sunrise and leave immediately after for Tuscany where our contracts call us."

So much confidence on the part of this devoted and perspicacious friend strengthens my

optimism; and side by side we return to the hangars.

Dusk comes; the mountains fade away in the far horizon and the first stars appear. The aerodome is like a great desert and we hear the soft prelude of the summer night concert. Then the enchantment of the glow-worms begins; close to the ground at the level of the high gramineous plants first appear little blue flashes —so rapid, so fugitive, so hesitating that one doubts their reality. Then new lights show themselves and become brighter and more numerous. As the darkness deepens the tiny sparks grow in intensity and frequency. Very soon, over the black water where the shadows of the trees intensify the darkness of the night, luminous quadrilles are organized and that silent dance of stars, some brighter than others, is like a mysterious fairy scene. We end our walk among a multitude of glow-worms.

After a short meal the men have resumed their labours on the airplane; they have lighted the acetylene lamps and the night work begins even harder and more feverish after the exhausting heat of the day. Absorbed by my task I almost forget the tragic preoccupations of the evening and with an effort of the will I concentrate on trying to eliminate, as far as it is possible, the

weaknesses of my machine—that inanimate object whose fallibility causes us constant concern. And although it is not the first time that our labour has been prolonged after dark in this manner there is something nervous and queer about us to-night; the slightest sounds seem hostile; the acetylene flares whistle and sputter with a disquieting noise.

Outside is the great, solemn night—and the impressive silence.

At last the work is completed. The exhausted mechanicians throw themselves down anywhere and fall asleep. I settle down on a soldier's cot under the very wings of my airplane. Since I must try my new engine at daybreak it is better to remain here for the rest of the night.

In the sleeping hangar the only noises are the whistling of the acetylene lamps and the crackling of the sheet-iron roof contracting at the cold contact of the dew, or the patter upon it of the claws of some night bird.

Lying on my camp bed I cannot go to sleep; I think—and, in spite of myself, my thoughts always turn to the war. I find myself listening intently as if expecting to detect something menacing lurking outside in the dark. But nothing disturbs the outer silence save the sound

of the water from the brook which runs by the side of the hangar.

Suddenly I hear, very far away, an automobile. Instinctively—and without knowing why—I follow, with extraordinary anxiety, the sound of its approach. I hear it cross the little bridge at the entrance of the aviation field; it stops for a minute to allow the guard to open the creeking gates; then I hear the grating of the gears and the automobile turn toward our hangars at top speed. It stops in front of the little door and two Italian officers enter. They seem surprised to find me there with my men in the dimly lit hangar. After saluting me courteously they tell me that war has been declared between France and Germany and that their mission is to place sentinels in front of all the non-military hangars. Without listening any further, and to the surprise of my men, C—— and I jump into an automobile and dash off in the dark night toward the town while the mechanicians and even the sentinels cry: "*Eviva la Francia!*"

At once, seized by an overwhelming desire for action and struggle, I enter the great turmoil and surrender to the formidable destiny.

II

The Way to the Clouds

IT IS a raw dawn after a windy and rainy night. Great clouds hustle across the dark sky and there are sharp gusts of wind.

Near the monoplane to which the groundmen are clinging with all their strength Captain F——, leaning on his stick, is giving the pilot his final instructions. The latter, a famous champion, until yesterday attended the exhibition meetings at all the aerodromes; he is now very simply fulfilling his military duties. Armed, and wearing his helmet and leather mask, he listens with respectful attention to the captain who is saying in a friendly and familiar manner:

"My boy, you are to take this passenger and these dispatches due north as far as X——. Your only order is: '*Arrive.*' Don't try to accomplish any feats on the way. If you are brought down, destroy everything; if you escape, reach X—— as quickly as possible and present

yourself to the General with your passenger who will then deliver his verbal message."

Then he courteously salutes us and, shaking our hands, says:

"Good luck, friends, and be prompt."

Slowly the day breaks; a fresh easterly breeze cleans out the sky and a wonderful yellow-and-red glow marks the place where the sun soon will appear.

While the pilot examines the machine I settle myself in the passenger's seat with the package, addressed to the General, between my legs. I fasten a rifle to the fuselage on either side.

We are ready. The propeller is started and the motor lets out a heroic roar; the machine starts bumping on the ground—then, little by little, ascends. In front of me the pilot, huddled in his seat and attentive, regulates the ascension with little jerks of his control levers, and already below us our beloved aerodrome begins to look like a large drawing with its double line of hangars, its pond, its paths running through the cultivated land.

We go due north. The easterly breeze blowing under our wings jostles us and gives us a slight side drift.

We are going fast, with a strong current of air in our faces, and still ascending. Below

lies our crucified France. But the smoke of many fires away in the northwest is the only thing that makes her bleeding wounds evident to us!

We settle down to our monotonous flight through the cold, fresh air above the indistinct countryside. The pilot clinging to his control levers is perfectly still; every now and then great gusts coming from the east shake us and throw us out of our route.

Suddenly the pilot stops the engine and the machine seems to stand still. Turning around my companion points to little black tufts of smoke which are floating in the wind below us; then he motions to me to listen but all I can hear is the whistling of the wind in the rigging, the humming of the propeller, and the ticking of the motor as it turns passively. Then the pilot switches on the ignition and the loud song of the engine once more drowns everything else.

The little tufts of smoke get nearer and more numerous. We try to go higher, but a gale throws us on our side. With prodigious promptitude the pilot straightens the machine but almost immediately another and more terrible jerk makes it stand almost vertical and we lose altitude.

We level up and fly straight forward at top

speed in the midst of lightning-like flashes and smoke. I cling to the fuselage and wait for the inevitable without a thought, my capacity for emotion having entirely left me.

At last we have passed the terrible zone; below us lies a big forest cut across by ditches. It is during this period of renewed calm—with our confidence restored—that an immediate and formidable danger menaces us. We have hardly emerged from the infernal zone when the machine inclines on one wing. The pilot cuts the ignition and, half turning, points with his head to a torn piece of canvas on the left wing which is flapping in the wind. Before I have time to think we begin to descend at lightning speed and almost at once this changes into a fall. Before I have realized how near we are to the earth we land, with a dreadful jerk—but successfully, in a narrow glade. Only such an experienced pilot as this would have attempted such a desperate landing. He is very calm although his face still betrays the anguish through which he has just passed. Jumping down on the ground he cries to me:

"Take the arms while I repair the machine!" He works rapidly, glueing a patch on the damaged wing and saying: "Quick! Quick! If the Boches arrive shoot while I set fire to the ma-

chine and then we shall make a run for it. Quick! Quick!"

While I watch he goes on with his work repeating mechanically: "Quick! Quick!" Then, without saying a word, he motions to me to help him lift the tail of the machine. Bent double by the effort, we drag the airplane to the other end of the glade. With only enough room for a short run this daredevil is going to try to fly from what is practically a standing start.

But our feet catch in the roots and we stumble over the stones. Tired out, we must let go of the tail of the plane. The pilot—always repeating "Quick! Quick!" as if obsessed, is pale and perspiring from the effort. Suddenly I see him leap forward and thrust his revolver under the nose of a dirty and rough-looking individual who has approached, unheard. I seize a rifle while the man, his hands in his pockets, sways on his legs and calmly says:

"We belong here and have been hiding ever since the Boches came. We act as guides for our men through the woods. The others are near and we will help you to get off."

It is all true. At his call "the others"—just as dirty, just as untidy—come forward and catch hold of the plane. In a moment we are in our places and everything is ready.

At a signal from the pilot the propeller is started and we move off, bumping badly at first, then flying just above the heather. At last we soar upward but the trees come toward us with extraordinary rapidity and seem to grow in height as they approach. I wait, gripping the fuselage. The pilot in front seems carved in stone. The trees get larger and larger; we can't possibly pass! Then, suddenly—with an almost vertical jump, indicating an astounding precision—we clear the obstacle, slightly brushing the highest branches, and fly out over an ocean of green leaves while the high wind dries the sweat of agony which glued our clothes to our backs.

Now relaxing, almost cheerful, we go on our way—always ascending. On the border of the woods the lightning and smoke reappear but a sudden turn on one wing allows us to regain the shelter of the forest and we mount still higher. When we go back once more the guns have ceased to fire and soon after we begin to descend, find the French lines, and thus carry out our orders.

III

The Chase

"THAT *cochon* of an engine is still pounding! . . ."

At the outskirts of a wood, on a meadow already autumnal in shade, we are all standing around a biplane. A heavy midday heat, like that at the end of August, is weighing on the countryside; the air is blowing lightly over the stubble fields and we can guess at the great *remous** which jostle the atmosphere above the cool edge of the great woods.

We are there holding council beside the powerful 180-h. p. motor whose heavy, brass-capped cylinders are visible radiating around the shaft. To our left, under the trees, stands the embryonic beginnings of an aviation camp: for the machine, an improvised shelter made with wooden poles and awnings; for the attendants, a hut. They are doing their best, these ground-

**Remous:* A local movement or condition of the air which may cause displacement of an airplane.

men, and already are busy with the engine—testing it, pulling it to pieces, and then assembling it again. All this to the accompaniment of the rattle of their wrenches and the sucking of the air in the cylinders as the propeller is turned.

A scorching sun darts forth its rays on the group. The heat obliges us to take refuge under the neighbouring trees where we are able to rest our tired eyes and burned faces while the mechanicians finish their exacting labour.

Every day, beginning at early dawn, we have been cruising above this valley at an altitude of a few hundred metres. This inglorious duty of aërial sentinels has been assigned to us so that we may lie in wait for the enemy airplanes bound for our capital to murder the helpless. Our task is as tedious as that of a Sunday guard along a deserted boulevard in a provincial garrison town. It is without glory. As soon as the adversary sees us he will turn around in great haste, barely taking time to fire a volley from his rifle when well out of range, and will disappear in the horizon as usual. If we let him pass and force him to fight on his way back, he will already have accomplished his murders. Our duty, although inglorious, is not without grandeur.

To-day, ever since dawn, we have been tracing the same orbit. During the morning it has been peaceful sailing with nothing to remind us that we are at war. The fields were empty and the forests quiet; no convoys on the roads; the horizon was free from those heavy fumes of fires which are the sign of the Teuton's presence, his flag floating in the clouds.

Then the sun ascending toward the zenith brought with it the *remous* which always come during the hottest part of the day. They alternately balance and jostle us; at times they are gentle and rock us like the swells of a smooth sea; then they become rapid, short, and angry like storm waves.

These eddies of the air render flying difficult; it becomes irregular, jerky, and anxious. They grow stronger hour by hour and increase the discomfort of our burning skins and dry and irritated eyes, so that when the engine begins to pound, probably as the result of misfiring a cylinder, we gladly start to descend. At noon we land by our camp and the groundmen take over the machine. We can enjoy a short rest after the long and empty morning. Observers stationed along the road which the Germans must follow tirelessly continue to scan the sky.

His approach, discovered even before he has reached the distant horizon, will be the signal for us to soar to the encounter—with what impatience and joy!

After a short and frugal lunch we fling ourselves down in the cool shade for a short rest. In the fields reigns the great prostrate silence of a torrid afternoon. The mechanicians are trying our engine and every now and then its brave voice resounds through the air; then the silence falls once more—it seems as if this heat would never subside.

Suddenly an almost imperceptible hum is heard in the empty sky. Little by little it grows into a roar. We jump up and run to our biplane holding our field glasses in our hands. The groundmen have already run to the plane and with wonderful rapidity have taken their stations. Then all cry at once:

"There it is! There it is!"

After the lapse of a few seconds, during which we settle in our seats, we hear more cries:

"It is a French machine, it is an X——"

Then we take time to look, ourselves. A French scouting plane of the light type is approaching rapidly. Almost above our heads it dives suddenly, turns on itself, comes yet nearer, and drops a white paper which falls like a

butterfly. Then after a new acrobatic turn on one wing it flies away at the same dizzy speed!

The mechanicians run for the message. It is a sheet of paper ballasted with a rifle ball and bearing these words traced with a pencil in a large, firm handwriting:

"Mon: Taube Xx armoured.
Dirct: from S^{x}, going S. W. W.
Alt: 1,000
Arm^{t}? rifles
Very speedy, powerful, stationary engine, 150 HP??"

It is all quite clear to us. A Taube is on its way to Paris with the purpose of committing murder and escaping immediately afterward. Providence is bringing it our way as a compensation for our long, tedious hours of useless watching.

Before we have as yet had time to start, a motorcyclist comes racing out of the woods. At the telephone post where he was on duty news confirming our information has just been received. The little monoplane from its hasty glance had judged well. All its indications were correct and are confirmed by the telephonic report.

What a happy moment! Quick on our way!

The engine is unmuzzled and lets forth its clamour. At the signal given by my comrade, who grips the control, we start. With a great push on the stabilizer we are well up in the sky almost in a single bound.

At a point dominating the landscape we describe great circles and minutely search the horizon toward the north. Nothing! We tack back and forth like a sailboat and cross the enemy's route over and over again. Obstinately I tighten my grasp on the trigger of the machine gun while the pilot, an example of rigid attention, is like a graven image. Only his eyes, dilated in spite of the blinding light, seem living and, with his white lips, make his face seem cold and ferocious.

Then suddenly, before my senses have registered any impression, I feel a great wave of anxiety and joy and I understand that the great day has come, that the moment is near, that the enemy is there. My pilot has also seen him; he makes a quick motion with his feet and a slight movement to the left with his hands. With remarkable precision we turn and dart straight toward him.

Powerfully and irresistibly we fly toward what as yet is only a dot in the sky, while behind us our engine sounds a heroic charge.

At great speed we fly directly at him. We are going to attack him from in front as his propeller will prevent him from firing straight forward. If we come up to him without having hit our mark we shall, with a sudden dive, pass underneath him and there will still be a few tenths of a second in which to shoot at him; directly afterward we shall become vulnerable in our turn, and exposed to his fire! . . .

How am I to describe those minutes—so long in their shortness, so empty of events, yet so full of anguish?

Clinging to the machine gun, my eyes glued to the sights, my hands riveted to the controls—motionless, anæsthetized, automatic—I desperately try to hasten the approach of my prey, filled with anguish at the idea of not being able when the time comes to make the precise motion which will let loose the stream of bullets.

Oh, those eternal seconds! Will they never end?

Yes, it all finished with a stupefying rapidity. The enemy sees us and escapes with his usual cowardly manœuvre.

Before he is yet within range he plunges suddenly, wheels about, and rapidly flies away. All we can see is the silhouette of his rigging against the white background of the sky. We

give chase, but in vain. Mad with fury we send a volley after him, but from too great distance to do any good.

We have to abandon the chase. Exhausted and in despair we turn homeward in the twilight.

IV

The Merciless Enemy

ALL night the wind has been howling. There have been frequent cold showers and occasional shrieking squalls. And now comes a pink and peaceful dawn! A yellow autumnal sun mounts in the washed-out sky.

In front of the hangar on the short grass a small and graceful monoplane seems to look at the sky as it stands in readiness for a flight.

It is a fast scouting plane which I am to take to the front at R—— for the artillery. The sky is clear, the weather fine, and the machine is without cargo. Navigating will be a real pleasure, like a promenade in peace time.

"Gasolene on, ignition off," cries the mechanician, grasping the propeller.

I answer as an echo: "Gasolene on."

"Ignition on," calls the mechanician.

When I reply: "Ignition on," he gives the propeller a strong whirl.

The engine coughs, kicks backward, and stops. The mechanician says:

"Switch off."

"Switch off."

Then:

"Ignition on."

As soon as I have answered, the engine starts at full speed dragging the soldiers who are clinging to the plane. At my signal they let go. (I prefer this old method—dating back to the heroic times—to the more modern but, in my opinion, more uncertain one of unlocking the wheels.)

After three leaps on the ground I rise almost unawares. I steady the machine, then give it its head. One more powerful leap and we are in mid-air.

Up there in the yellow glare of the sun, surrounded by a perfectly still atmosphere, the flight becomes peaceful and monotonous.

Of itself the machine gains more altitude. A look at the map, a slight movement with the feet on the swingle bar to rectify the direction —it is easy sailing!—— If I were a poet I should be inspired to write verses during such happy moments, one hand resting carelessly on the lever, the other fingering the pen on the little folding desk.

Below, the lonely country unfolds itself, but by degrees it assumes an unwonted aspect.

Gone is my quietude; anxiously I seek to interpret this sudden change. The pale sun is playing on the hills but the background seems full of gray and quiet water; trees emerge here and there like islets. Then I understand: the mist is falling and my pleasant voyage must terminate at once if I don't want it to end in horror!

However, while looking for a possible landing place, I notice that the yellow rays of the sun are becoming stronger. When it rises higher in the sky it may dispel the fog which is lying very low on the cold, damp ground.

If that hope is denied I shall soon be enveloped by the nightmare of the fog. Where is the airman who does not feel a cold chill strike to his marrow when he hears that word?

Without taking time to reflect I dive downward in the direction of a small yellow strip of ground which I perceive rising above the mounting edge of the fog. I make straight for it at a dizzy speed but when I have almost reached the ground I see a deep inequality traversing the terrain like a scarf. A leap upward saves me from the grasp of the neighbouring trees and once more I fly to another point where there

seems to be a flat meadow. Just before landing I make out that the ground is rough and encumbered with enormous logs and bushes. Once more I ascend—thanks to great strokes of the stabilizer—but the mist is falling and thickening and when at last I have traversed that infernal layer, and found the sun once more, I am hovering above a smooth, uniform sea of livid gray.

Then begins a terrifying journey. My pangs are those of one racing toward an abyss. I am tortured by the terror of being swallowed by those ferocious clouds!

Above, a placid sun shines with a yellow glow and its calm serenity is horrible as we rush toward the inevitable.

The volleys from machine guns and the great commotion caused by the shells exploding close by are a thousand times preferable! In the sunshine at least one sees one's enemy and one dashes downward intoxicated with a holy wrath.

At lowest speed I enter this sinister, inscrutable atmosphere; a cold chill strikes me, penetrating to my very bones. With great swings on the stabilizer—as if by very force of movements I wished to get away from this agony—I remount toward the sunshine above this hell.

Mentally I count the drops of gasolene in the fuel tank and which are in reality the drops of

my blood—the minutes, the seconds of my life!

From up there, nothing! The livid clouds in the sunshine appear as if sprinkled with a yellow powder. Everything is motionless as death. Nothing to make one anticipate a gust of wind or a miraculous opening in the thick opacity which conceals the earth from me.

The sailor lost on the immensity of the ocean hopes and waits in an inaction which spares the strength of his body and of his soul. I must keep going until the end, no matter what my agony.

The minutes pass—so long, so empty, yet so full of anxiety . . . the gasolene wastes away drop by drop. . . . This agony lasts too long. . . . Is there an iron soul who can master his flesh in similar circumstances?

Haggard, at the end of my emotions, horrified and automatic, I bury myself once more in this misty shroud and descend.

I come down with the speed of a projectile toward the treacherous snares hidden in this sinister twilight. It seems as if the sun would never shine again!

Every now and then mechanically I straighten the machine, cut off the motor, and listen. Nothing but the wailing of the wind in the rig-

ging and the chattering of my teeth. Then I once more plunge against the desperate recoil of my body, sweating, my hair standing on end. How easy it would be to march straight toward the bullets, one's chest bare, carried away by the heroic clamour of the struggle in the sunshine!

Then all of a sudden I see the earth! With incredible promptitude I cut the ignition and *cabre*.* Then I shut my eyes and cling to my levers.

Oh, the centuries of anxiety! The wheels touch—then the runners; toward what abyss are they taking me? At the end of my control I let go everything and hide my head in my hands like a frightened child. The agony is too long! It seems as if the machine would never stop. The obstacles may be anywhere, it is of no use to steer——!

It ends like the sudden disappearance of a great pain. The machine slows down and stops on flat terrain.

Shakily I climb down on the steady ground. In the distance I here the tremendous roar of the battle. I throw myself on the ground, embrace Mother Earth, and thank God with the fervour of a child.

**Se Cabrer*: to fly or glide at an excessive angle of incidence; tail down.

V

The Jonah

IF THAT happens to me again I shall hang myself to the projecting planes of my machine."

It is a damp and depressing evening; a misty twilight obscures the horizon. A large biplane has just landed after groping its way down. Our dear comrade R—— comes toward us swinging his helmet in his hand. As brave as a knight, heroic with simplicity, always gay, witty, and mocking, he lays stress on the comic side of his anger:

"Next time I shall hang myself, I declare and swear it!"

And as we ask him to explain he says:

"A moment, please, let me warm myself. I am chilled to the marrow and my feet are numb."

A few greasy rags moistened with gasolene are quickly alight and we are soon surrounded by a great reddish halo from wherein all outside

disappears. In the impressive silence of the empty fields one can hear only the distant cries of the service men taking in the biplane and our friend's gay voice. Told in the melancholy twilight his story causes us much amusement:

"It seems as if a jealous destiny enjoyed taking from me my most legitimate victims; I have promised myself to bring down a Taube and I can't succeed. Meanwhile, the famous X—— team has never missed a single one, and pretty soon there won't be any left for the others." He adds in a funny, confidential manner:

"My observer is a great criminal in that respect. Always busy with his notebook and pencil he only turns around to say: 'Lower! Nearer!' as if the shots weren't already falling around us. When he has seen all and put everything down in his book he tells me to go back. The thunder from Heaven could not make him budge before! Personally I boil with impatience when I see a Boche flying about in the distance. With a little stick I tap on the shoulder of my observer and, showing him the enemy, try to persuade him to let me jump on him. No use! He makes a gesture as if brushing off a bothersome fly and goes on with his work. What can one do with such a rascal?

"Consequently I was not at all sorry when

this morning the commandant of the squadron told me:

"My friend, you are going to take your machine back to the repair centre; it needs a thorough overhauling: your engine coughs as if it were consumptive; your surfaces are twisted like the leaves of a cabbage—very æsthetic, probably, but not much lifting capacity—and your rear planes are as full of holes as *schweizer* cheese of poor quality.

"The chief was perfectly right, so I started off—but not without first filling the tank with gasolene and taking with me my faithful *Mecanico** than whom there is no one better for tickling an H. O. automatic rifle. I flew off looking good and tame. I hadn't gone up 200 metres when I perceived my observer already galloping on the field in search of another victim! As soon as I was out of sight, instead of coming straight here I made a little hook in the direction of the Boches to the joy and enthusiasm of my companion.

"We went on for quite a long time without seeing anything. I was beginning to despair when my *mecano* pointed to a small dot in the far horizon which it seemed was going in a direction perpendicular to ours."

**Mecano:* Mechanician.

(Although accustomed to taking part in such adventures almost every day we suddenly become attentive and come closer to the narrator. In spite of himself his voice has lost its mocking tone and become grave.)

"We were approaching him; he was going on his way as if he had not seen us. Very soon we could recognize the machine; it was a German, all right, a great armoured monoplane. He was faster than we and didn't seem to mind us. I tried to manœuvre so as to cut his retreat. I was absolutely calm and so was my mechanician. I even adjusted the needle valve in order to improve the carburation. As for the German, he continued on his way and passed to my right so that I had to oblique. He was evidently counting on his speed to escape. I began the chase and it seemed everlasting!

"All of a sudden he changed his route, turning on himself and going northward. I immediately manœuvred in the same manner. The chase had hardly begun again when he spun around with astounding rapidity and at full speed, cut backward toward my rear in the direction from which we had come. Then he seemed to become completely crazy, made another dive, and again changed his route going westward. I kept manœuvring so as to attack his flank, but I

always missed him as he was wonderfully quick in his evolutions.

"And suddenly—(Ah, my friends, what a blow!)—I saw and I understood! The Taube was trying to escape from one of our biplanes which—rapid, direct, and merciless—was attacking him from the opposite flank.

"It was quickly over! While I was raging at my machine—whose speed was too slow to permit me to join in and help my comrade in case of need—I saw the German give an awful lurch, straighten himself, slip on one wing, straighten again, and at last come down.

"It lasted only a few seconds—but what seconds! The Frenchman dived after the other, following him down to verify the result. But it was the end. The German machine fell in a clump of trees and almost immediately exploded and burned. There was no possible landing place in the neighbourhood of the fallen plane and anyway the daylight was fading. I left in haste. The French machine had already disappeared on the other side of the trees, where probably lies his camp.

"I was happy in spite of everything and, as for my companion, he was pounding his feet with a savage joy. But I would have infinitely preferred to do the work myself. I would have

chased him until nightfall if it had been necessary and I should have had him——"

Suddenly, changing his tone, he resumed with his old note of comic fury:

"I am sure it was that rascal F. N. who did me out. He disappeared at once, the bandit, fearing my just wrath! But I have warned you, the next time I miss a Boche I shall desert the army and get my naturalization as a citizen of Patagonia!"

VI

With Our Russian Comrades in Arms

MY VERY DEAR BROTHER,

"Surely I may call you by that name, now that the sublime relationship of bloodshed for the same cause has been added to that of our fraternal feeling dating from the old aviation days. I cannot remember without emotion those times when we conscientiously ploughed the fields of Issy with that tremendous biplane of yours, so very wide and high! But to-day I have not the heart to laugh with you about those blessed times. I must speak to you of our dear N——. You will shed tears, undoubtedly, but also you will be transported with enthusiasm when you learn how he has died. You and yours will not want to rest until you have avenged him.

"Toward the beginning of August we were quietly settled with our squadron in the neighbourhood of Kiev when the war clouds began to gather on the horizon. We had hardly realized

that the war was inevitable when we heard of the invasion of Belgium and that a strong Austrian army was marching against our own territory.

"Without waiting for reinforcements we started for the front one sunny morning with the whole Nieuport squadron.

"Our soldiers saw us arrive with a frenzy of joy. It seemed to them, in their simplicity, that we were bringing victory under our great wings. They also hoped that our presence would relieve them of some of their duties which were truly overwhelming. In too small number to stop the Austro-Hungarians they had been forced to retreat step by step under the continual push of the enemy. Always on the alert, poorly fed, without sleep, their tenacity was sublime, and at once they inspired us with the desire to help them, with the firm and savage will to hurl ourselves upon the foe and to destroy him.

"Another noble sentiment carried us forward, it was the inspiration of an order from our venerated Emperor saying:

> . . . You must now rely upon your weapons. The time has come when you must make every sacrifice. France, our dear ally who is sustaining the most formidable assault of all times, and our French brothers, who have so nobly taken their share of the holy task, are expecting every sacrifice from us.

"I swear to you, my dear brother, that the desire to help you inspired us as much as the thought of our own Motherland!

"So the next morning at daybreak we embraced each other and left for our own respective missions. Our work was efficacious and the retreat was stopped. But at sundown only four out of six Nieuports landed at the General Headquarters.

"We have never learned how our brothers—carried away by their impetuosity amidst the storm of fire and shell—died.

"The next day we did such good work in scouting, bomb throwing, and artillery direction, that our little army was able to maintain itself in its positions and inflict severe losses upon the invader. In the evening, however, in the red sky above the battlefield, a squadron of Austrians could be seen.

"We then understood that the next dawn would witness great things! In a few hours the men of the air for the first time were going to meet in a merciless combat.

"I cannot remember those things, brother, without my heart leaping within me. Now that it is a thing of the past I who did not falter in the battle grow weak from the anguish of my recollections.

"Ah, that night, that dawn! . . . Scarcely had the eastern sky begun to lighten when the four of us took flight.

"The first rays of dawn were veiled in mist! Soon we were flying over the Austrian lines. We underwent severe firing without any harm and replied with our bombs and grenades; then, one by one, in rapid succession, the six Austrian machines emerged from the fog.

"We had the advantage of altitude and, with a single swoop, we pounced down upon them and launched our bombs. One Austrian exploded and fell, but two of ours, hit by bullets, began to descend dizzily toward our lines.

"N—— and I were left. We made a quick turn and flew back to our enemies who were trying to escape in order to mount higher. As we reached them we gave them another volley of bombs. Two Austrians left the fight and one of them fell, but a bullet had pierced my tank and in all haste I had to regain the landing with the terrible anxiety of not reaching it quickly enough and of taking fire in the air.

"My observer, facing backward, kept his rifle to his shoulder to protect our retreat. N——, tremendously high up, had disappeared in the sunshine toward the west. Two of the enemy had abandoned the fight and were descending in

slow circles. Only one large monoplane of German type was chasing us. He made for us at an impressive speed trying all the time to mount higher. The gasolene was still leaking from our tank and the slightest burst of flame would have been fatal to us. All the time the German plane was getting nearer and nearer. It was armoured, manned by a crew of three, and was mounted with a long machine gun. My comrade opened fire. The other did not reply. His propeller was in the way and also he had the sun in his eyes. Then he came up to us. My companion's rifle fire quickened. I dared not accelerate the engine. How terribly long it seemed! The other gained on our right flank. He was going to shoot. I took a chance and dived desperately.

"My comrade was firing with wonderful rapidity but suddenly stopped to point toward the sky above the German. Ah! brother, how can I find words eloquent enough to relate those things!

"Above the German, N—— was flying and mercilessly throwing grenades on him. The other defended himself by a vertical fire and I wanted to cry out: 'Enough! Go away; abandon me!' I could only pray and hope—transported with fear and admiration for my friend.

"And then, brother, I had to witness what followed—and until death will be horrified by the remembrance. Unable to master the German, N—— suddenly dived, barring the other's way, and before the former had time to turn to escape, N—— struck him like a battering ram.

"Twisted and entangled, they both crashed to the ground in flames. Horrified and despairing, I do not yet know how I managed to land a few minutes later.

"What more can I say, my very dear brother? My eyes are blinded with tears and my heart is heavy!"

VII

The Combat on the Ground

WE ARE navigating laboriously among the gray clouds. Now and then a gust of wind tears them apart momentarily, unmasking a dull sun, but almost immediately we reënter the limitless mist. The light is like that of a tomb and we grope about like blind men.

Twice already we have descended to an altitude of 600 metres to reconnoitre the ground and as often we have had to ascend again in haste pursued by shells and bullets.

Navigating becomes more and more difficult; sometimes great squalls strike us; the rudder is not sufficient to straighten us and we must use the *ailerons*.* Sometimes an icy rain beats us furiously.

With the help of the compass alone, without any indication as to the drift, we try for our landing point.

**Aileron:* righting-tip; flap.

We are moving fast in the chaos of gray mist, our faces lashed by the drops from the big clouds heavy almost to the bursting point. We descend prudently, our eyes on the altimeter. From time to time we cut off the ignition and listen—trying to perceive an echo of the formidable roar filtering through the layer of clouds; but there is nothing except the wailing of the wind in the rigging and the clicking of the engine!

At last, through a clear spot, the earth appears. All is calm and deserted; we see a succession of forests, cultivated fields, and wooded ravines. Despite the wind the horizon is free from smoke. We come down still lower and make out a railway line running through the country. We must land to get our bearings.

We continue onward looking for a favourable landing point, ready to climb upward to the clouds if we seem too close to the battle.

The landing will be difficult, but it is more perilous to go on at hazard in this manner. Jostled and cramped, our muscles aching from fatigue, we cast our eyes along the interminable railroad in search of a bare portion of ground upon which to land.

Near a forking of the roads stand a few houses, and in the triangle between the two

tracks lies a beautiful open meadow. In ten seconds we are above it and coming down. Just as I am about to redress, a gust lifts us and lands us roughly before I have had time to start the engine. The propeller is smashed and we come to a stop. After a brusque about face.

It has happened with such brutal rapidity that we remain there stupefied—dazed—a little nauseated. Soldiers and peasants come running from the houses. Still dizzy, we climb down from our seats. The machine has not suffered much but cannot fly on account of its crushed wheels and smashed propeller. We must telephone to the repair centre and wait until they can send a convoy. A few moments more and we have pushed the biplane under some neighbouring trees to conceal it from the enemy.

There is now almost a sunset after the day full of showers and mist.

Suddenly the droning of a motor is heard in the clouds. As it grows louder we recognize the sound of a powerful engine of the stationary type, but as yet nothing can be seen below the clouds. We are observing close by the houses; the soldiers, all attention, are hidden under the trees.

It makes its appearance suddenly behind us

going eastward. It is indeed a German plane. It comes out of the clouds and travels onward with a regular and powerful flight. The wing-spread is immense and the machine gives an impression of weighty strength.

Like us, the pilot must have lost his way in the clouds, for he hesitates and slowly comes nearer the ground. He is going to pass out of range but suddenly turns to his right and continues his descent prudently and slowly in wide circles.

I have taken the rifle of a soldier and am to give the signal for the volley by firing the first shot.

The period of anxious expectation seems long as our prey alternately comes closer and goes farther away.

At last he approaches—comes nearer and nearer—and finally is within range.

Fire! The volley crashes like thunder in my ears, then comes the clicking of the arms being reloaded, and almost immediately another thunder crash. The plane seems to give a frightened bound and immediately the engine is accelerated and starts at full speed. A third volley bursts out. Then suddenly the thing happens: the German slides on one wing—then redresses; the propeller flies in a thousand pieces and the plane

comes to a stop. It plunges at last and comes to the ground, the pilot trying to reëstablish his equilibrium by vigorous use of the *ailerons*. As he passes in front of us, almost on the ground, he redresses. Nobody shoots now. There are three on board; the man behind is crouching and seems dead. They have passed us in their race toward death and my heart softens with pity before the coolness of the pilot and his desperate defence. And then, very quickly, it all ends. The plane capsizes on the ground with a great, dull thud and takes fire. Another few seconds elapse and its projectiles explode with a great crash like that of a volley of artillery. . . .

When we reach the place where our victims have fallen only the carcass of the machine remains; carbonized heads smoke in the glowing helmets. . . .

VIII

With the Blacks

THE order is simple, its accomplishment easy. But who can boast of being able to cheat Destiny when she is lying in wait at the turn of the hours?

Even before the departure the series of little incidents has begun which, when linked together and grown in importance, will conduct us to the final climax.

During a dull afternoon we are tramping in the mud of a suburban aerodrome.

The mechanics are giving the last touch to an airplane which we are to take to R——, where the troops are concentrating. It is an endless job to adjust the struts and stay wires, soften the levers which are too stiff, or search for the finest adjustment of the ignition.

The delay is prolonged and the hours of that hostile autumn day seem eternal.

At last the machine is ready; we start in great haste. To the roar of the engine suddenly

released we move off on the ground, the water from the many puddles splashing all about us. Then, quickly, in response to a little stroke on the elevator, we take off and ascend. Soon we are travelling at a great pace in the cold, gray air.

Strong local air currents, as regular as the ground swell of the sea, rock us gently.

Underneath and to our right lies Paris, extending to the horizon. Something has changed in its aspect since the outbreak of the war. From up here it gives an impression of amusing calmness. Is it on account of the disappearance of its dome of smoke, of the dusty and vibrating atmosphere which formerly extended its activity even into the sky?

This unusual transparency, this unwonted calm, permit us to take our exact bearings and around us, but more to the south and west, roll great masses of vapour stirred and wafted by the breeze. By contrast Paris and its horizon appear still clearer and more limpid. We are travelling westward toward those heavy clouds, increasing our speed—which is already tremendous—pressed hard by the thought of the coming dark.

And suddenly, without the transition of twilight, we plunge into an inexorable night. A

cold, opaque atmosphere and an icy dampness surround us. We are engulfed by the first waves of that tide of vapours which the prevailing westerly winds have thrown across our route.

We continue onward with alternative periods of diffuse light and sinister darkness. Very soon the clear spots become rarer and the semi-darkness more impressive! Great squalls jostle us and the drift throws us out of our way. Soon we are no longer able to make out during the fugitive periods of light the course of the river which marks our road. We have lost our way!

What can we do? Dusk falls and adds its sadness to all this gloom, its hostility to our anguish!

In a desperate descent we plunge through the clouds and now we navigate close to the ground at a moderate speed. We do not recognize the country. Above the valleys we are sucked down by great air currents and over the highlands there is a surf which shakes us roughly. The night falls more and more; very soon we shall be unable to make out the obstacles scattered on this unknown ground. We must descend. Toward the north we perceive a large green expanse of smooth terrain. In a few seconds, with our engine unleashed, we have reached it. On one side there is a huge swamp

and on the other a flat meadow. Between runs a road bordered by a few scattered houses.

In a few seconds more I have chosen the landing place and touched the ground. Motoring across the field I manœuvre to reach the edge of the large meadows in the direction of the houses when suddenly, fifty metres ahead of me, four giant Negroes appear. One of them, with much gesturing, orders me to stop; the others point their rifles in my direction. There is a mistake, but I must obey. Approaching closer I make them out as four *tirailleurs* returning from some fatigue duty carrying their burdens.

The corporal standing in front of his men—who continue to menace me—quickly runs through the usual formula of the challenge, then cries in his jargon:

"You come down and lift hands!"

My friend evidently has his mind made up. I obey—not without a protest which does not impress him in the slightest.

"If me not just, you complain to captain, commandant of Company. Come!"

Two men are placed as sentinels about the machine: one examines everything but without manifesting any opinion; the other, his mouth wide open, laughs so gleefully that the corporal,

Moriba Koulibali (I have just learned his name), fearing that this behaviour, very different from the usual impassibility of the tirailleurs, will make a bad impression on me, says severely:

"Mosa Keita, this be service. You will gain punishment." And turning toward me to make up for the bad opinion this incident might give me of the black tirailleurs the corporal adds:

"Him idiot, very!"

And thus, surrounded by my guards, I go off toward the houses to find the captain. On the way I try to convince Moriba that I am French; I even try on him the four words of Bambara I learned years ago between Podor and Bammako and I go as far as felicitating him on belonging to the wonderful family of the lion. But that is insufficient to convince him completely. He must have been taken in by some spy for he answers in a stubborn and suspicious manner:

"Him German—knows many ways to annoy tirailleurs!"

The conversation ends in this manner for here comes the captain in the midst of a small group.

There is nothing tragic about this placid evening and yet the hamlet bordering the road is in

ruins and the soft wind brings us the formidable echo of the battle.

The captain comes toward us; his black men, disbanded and carrying no arms, surround him as in peace time during the leisure hours at cantonment. In the calm evening it gives a powerful impression of security and repose.

He has recognized a French airplane and comes forward with outstretched hands and a kind, jovial laugh:

"Once more Moriba Koulibali has been up to some mischief. He has become impossible since he was taken in by the subtle words of a pseudo-English officer. I live in dread of the day when he will bring to me the *généralissime* between two tirailleurs with fixed bayonets."

Laughing at that ludicrous picture we walk back toward the airplane preceded by the tirailleurs who are running, jumping, and pushing each other to see the extraordinary machine.

They come from several different races of Negroes and in physique they differ markedly one from the other: the only thing they have in common is their remarkable childlike mentality and even that finds its expression in very different ways. The Yoloff, draped in his Mohammedan impassibility, observes in silence; the

Bambara and the Haussa are less dignified, but succeed in mastering themselves and in imitating the dignity of the Yoloff. But the Malinkes, the people from the Raoule or from the Southern Rivers, let themselves go to the most disorderly manifestations. Squatting, they suddenly turn a somersault and fall back on all fours, or they jump from one foot to the other, clapping their thighs. They all yell at the same time and nobody listens.

In a few words the captain describes the country to me. Impossible to take the biplane away by the road; it will be necessary to leave tomorrow at early dawn by the air route. Meanwhile a meagre cluster of trees will serve to hide our machine which makes a conspicuous object against the uniformity of the meadow and is noticeable from a distance.

Then we turn back to the cantonment. The black tirailleurs are living in shelters improvised from the ruined houses; but there is nothing about the ruins to betray their presence.

Night descends humid and cold whilst we visit the trenches behind the road. At intervals the great dull roar of the battle is carried to our ears by the wind. It is like an indistinct growling composed of slow vibrations, a dull murmur very low and grave, a wail from the earth! It

fills the air, comes from everywhere and from nowhere!

At times a lost shell passes in the distance, and although it is far away one hears its shrill whistle so sinister that it makes one shiver.

Now we go back to the houses where our meal is waiting. There is light, a garnished table and even a fire burning in the hearth! It is all so admirably hidden—buried in the ground—that no ray of light, not the least furtive trace of smoke, betrays life in the midst of these ruins.

Ah, what a comfortable impression of well-being, of warmth, and of security around that table in the yellow light of the candles! The familiar tirailleurs serve us with their awkward zeal. They are like gentle, devoted giants. They explain that they have never seen the enemy in spite of all their efforts, but they know that he is there—and numerous. They express it by saying: "There be savages, many!" It takes me back to the evening bivouacs with the Kong Expedition. Expressing the same thought, a tirailleur, exactly like this one in appearance, said: "There be men, many!"

Now the night has fallen. A deep silence reigns on the tragical plain disturbed only at long intervals by the wail of the wind in the ruins

and the slow and solemn murmur of the distant battle.

Reclining on some cases about the fire, gradually we fall asleep. Suddenly the clear crackling sound of rifle fire close at hand bursts out in the night. I jump up; but the captain, rolled in his blankets, only opens one eye and signs to me to go back to sleep. It is nothing. We are protected from any infiltration or treacherous attack of the enemy by several kilometres of ground guarded by double rows of sentinels, large pickets, little posts and patrols. Indeed, the firing ceases almost immediately and we resume our slumbers.

The hours pass. From time to time the tall silhouette of a black or white non-commissioned officer appears in the red glow of the fire. After each change of guard they come to report to the captain the incidents of the watch. Then all becomes silent once more. Only the wind sighs in the ruins.

The hours pass. Outside is the darkness of an autumnal night with everything enveloped in mist. Suddenly a long wail breaks the silence followed by a formidable burst of firing.

The captain lifts his head and laughs, saying to me:

"The Boches get an attack of nerves like that

every night. We shall enjoy the concert until dawn. Let us go back to sleep. Thanks to a trick of mine those good Prussians are shooting holes in a harmless swamp. To-morrow I will send someone over to pick up the fish killed by the explosions."

Still laughing, the captain explains his stratagem. Then, following his own advice, he goes back to sleep like a child while I jump at the exasperating noise of the cannonade

"Hello, the aviator! Wake up, old man! His ear was sensitive enough last night to the cannonade but now the thunder from above couldn't awaken him."

Confusedly I hear the good captain exclaim in this familiar and cordial manner. I struggle to my feet and quickly come back to the realities of the present.

It is still dark and the roar of artillery and musketry fills the air (How could I have slept in the midst of that storm?)! The glow from the dying fire is barely sufficient to allow me to distinguish the shadowy figures of the captain, his lieutenants, and a few white non-commissioned officers—all equipped and armed for the fight—who are standing about waiting for me.

Very much ashamed of myself, I dress in haste while the captain explains in a fatherly manner:

"This is a real awakening, with all the bugles blowing. You are a good sleeper. We waited until the last minute to call you. Now we must go quickly to the trenches; but first we will have a good cup of coffee with a drop of *riquiqui*."

Instinctively I turn my eyes to the hearth to see if that promised coffee is being made in the regular Sudanese manner, that is to say strained through a dirty handkerchief. Everybody laughs at my gesture.

This simplicity on the morning of a combat, the kindly playful tone which the captain assumes in spite of his manly and military bearing, are not without grandeur.

During this infernal war I have been more than once the witness of hard victories of will over instinct; there are always moments when one can perceive the traces of the struggle on the tortured and sweating faces. That, too, is not without its grandeur. But how much finer is the simple heroism of this chief who on the morning of a battle is able to maintain a playful and amiable tone in the most natural manner.

Meanwhile, the storm comes nearer; we must leave our shelter in the ruins. While we are creeping out the head of Mahmadou Kamara,

sergeant, appears in the vent hole. He has come to report that the captain's orders have been executed. The advanced units have rallied; the enemy is advancing in large numbers and is about four kilometres away. The captain with simplicity turns toward us and says:

"Gentlemen, let us go to our places. The aviator will come with us; the Prussians will be on us before dawn. As we cannot take the machine behind the entrenchments we will leave it hidden beneath the trees."

At my request, however, he consents to give me a few men to construct a covering of branches in order to conceal the plane better.

We go forward. Outside it is still pitch dark with only occasional lightning flashes from the artillery. The sinister song of the shells begins again intermingled with the shriller whine of the bullets. We advance over the open space in front of the houses. My tirailleurs very calm, almost nonchalant, walk noiselessly in Indian file. Besides, for some reason that I can't explain, the shower of projectiles is not very impressive; it is too widespread, too distant; it seems as if the night protected us against every danger. And yet at times a soft *floc* warns us that some balls are falling in our immediate vicinity.

We soon perceive by the diffuse light of the rockets the clump of trees and my biplane. There I am more aware of the danger for the balls are falling thick among the branches. We must hurry. Silently my black men get hold of the machine, drag it into a fold of the ground by the side of the embankment bordering the road and its barbed-wire entanglement. The Negroes pull out the *coupe-coupe** of their Barda and in no time have constructed a leafy covering which hides the machine.

Our task accomplished we return to the entrenchments; it is high time, for the shells, after first feeling their way in the dark, are now comming nearer the mark and the balls are falling fast. Amidst the overwhelming din of the bombardment one can already distinguish the jerky, hammering sound of the machine guns. The attack is evidently developing.

In the dark, illuminated by lightning flashes, we reach a small sewer which passes under the road. It is the passageway leading to the trenches, and the captain is waiting for us at the entrance of this vaulted tunnel.

Immediately upon entering this *boyau* we cease to hear the whistle of the projectiles. The trembling of the ground is the only thing which

*A knife somewhat resembling the machete.

reveals the storm going on above. When we reach the other end of the passage the noise is resumed as suddenly as it ceased.

Now we arrive in the trenches. The men are lying down or sitting; a few are still sleeping, crouched at the bottom of the holes. The captain and I go toward a central dugout where I am to stay by his side. Every now and then we pass underneath a bomb-proof parapet—at those places the trench becomes a narrow subterranean boyau—then we resume our walk.

Above our heads the infernal noise increases. It seems as if the projectiles were falling in compact masses. At times they burst so very near and so rapidly that the plain is illuminated by red or white lightning flashes.

We continue on our way beneath the infernal shower but very much reassured by the observation that our men have suffered very little as yet from this bombardment. The first emotion has almost vanished; only when the vicious whine of the bullets is too close to my ears do I "salute" by ducking my head between my shoulders as if to hide it. At those times the captain—with round, frightened eyes, in imitation of me—makes the same movement and laughs in a gay, care-free manner.

Finally we arrive at the dugout. The bom-

bardment continues, monotonous and regular. A few shots have reached their mark and already through the ditches and passageways the first fallen black men are being carried back.

Gradually the shells become more numerous and more accurate. From minute to minute the advance guards fall back; some pass through the little sewer under the road, the others come one knows not how. Without having perceived a man in the short grass out in front, one sees a rifle drop down in the trench, then a head covered to the neck by a *chechia** appears on the parapet, and finally a large body rolls into the trench.

On the western horizon fires are blazing and the illumination of the artillery becomes more intense. Mechanically one's attention is fixed by the great flashes of light and by the formidable noises, but momentarily one becomes aware of the smaller incidents in one's immediate surroundings. Although the evacuation of the dead and wounded toward the rear is going on incessantly it is difficult to connect those victims with that spectacle of light and sound. In that tumult one lives without a thought but also without anguish.

And suddenly the dawn comes. The day

*Zouave cap.

breaks peacefully through the mists of the east while one's attention is held by the formidable storm raging in front. One is so fully absorbed by the tragical aspect of things that this tranquil bluish dawn surprises one as something unexpected, almost unwanted. Suddenly I become conscious of the danger without having felt any preliminary beginnings of this emotion. Mysteriously related to the background of the past an anguish swells in me similar to that experienced in the days of my childhood when confronted with the tragic or the unexpected. It is a physical sensation of dryness and of constriction of the throat with a feeling of palpitation. It is horrible to meet once more this sensation of one's distant childhood in the midst of such a cataclysm.

Near me the captain, still calm and smiling, is observing and meditating; gradually his face hardens. He turns toward a man crouching at his feet to give him an order when suddenly a mud-bespattered face, bristling with energy, appears above the end of the trench between two sacks of earth. It is a non-commissioned liaison officer bringing orders from the battalion commander. He had been vainly attempting to find the rear entrance of our cave and had been looking for the captain every-

where. Crawling along through the mud, with the shells falling all around him, he had found his way through the swamp. His message delivered, he goes off with the greatest simplicity to attempt his return by the same adventurous route.

Then gradually comes a lull; the shrapnel arrives at greater intervals. Now one can hear another cannonade in the distance. The captain cries in my ear that the assault is coming. He gives his orders with the help of the bugle's clear notes; he sends off some runners to the rear; then, with great calm, his duties accomplished, he picks up a rifle. A savage joy shines on his face. I also take a rifle and, watching with all my senses alert, I try to discover an enemy out in the meadow beyond the road and the barbed-wire entanglement. The shells are falling at still greater intervals and the firing has almost stopped when, suddenly, a volley starts from one of our trenches—then another; and then we hear a crackling of the machine gun placed at the entrance of the sewer which passes under the road. Still I can see no enemy. I am impatiently waiting for the moment when I can use my weapon against a visible foe and will no longer have to fear being taken by surprise.

The enemy did appear—with surprising sud-

denness. I was turning an inquiring face to the captain when a volley started from our own trench and I saw, at about one kilometre's distance, a grayish mass swarming in the meadow. It appeared and disappeared in the vagueness and confusion of distance. I could make out neither advance nor retreat. And the noise of our fire—which seems so slight when far away—shook us like thunder. It continued almost monotonous in its violence and then without assuming any new characteristics gradually died down.

Now the musketry has completely ceased; only the shells, rarer and rarer, shriek and whistle in the air before exploding. And it drags along in this manner interminably. The tirailleurs, crouching in the trenches beside their arms, eat; one of them even concocts a kind of coffee in his canteen over a few bits of burning straw.

The period of respite grows long and I think that soon we shall be able to come out of our holes. It will not take me long to jump in my biplane and fly away from these combats in the mud toward that other kind of battle which I prefer.

But the captain does not relax. Unaffected by this lull in the fighting, he keeps his observers

perched in the trees or on the walls—and waits.

While I try to obtain permission to go and see my machine, a new attack begins.

After a brief but violent storm of shell fire the intermittent musketry fire recommences and once more we see the gray masses of the enemy swarming confusedly in the fields one kilometre away. Like the first time, we reply with vigour and method but the attack is slack and leaves us indifferent except for the fear that it may continue for some time.

Then suddenly, when the enemy believes he has wearied our patience and weakened our ardour, he reveals the ambush, the treacherous blow from behind which he has been preparing.

It is the shriller whistling of the balls, the crackling of the firing closer to us which first makes us realize that the attack has changed its direction. Almost immediately the hammering of a machine gun bursts on our left very near the road, but we have not yet been able to locate it exactly when a clamour bursts forth from one of our trenches. The captain, his face terrible in its concentrated anger, quickly takes the necessary defensive measures. The trenches, which have been taken in enfilade, are evacuated and we turn to face the new assailants. At the same

moment hoping to profit from the confusion the enemy presses his frontal attack.

It goes on in this manner while we retreat from ditch to ditch in proportion as the attack on our left, always invisible, makes itself felt. And now I understand the emotion of the captain and why his rigid face seemed to be trying to conceal a great sorrow; he had just received the order to hold until the arrival of reinforcements and his heart was bleeding at the thought of so many of his tirailleurs whom he would have to leave behind in those sinister trenches.

Now we are firing continuously and at will. Each man chooses his mark, aims, fires as quickly as possible, and reloads—keeping the magazine filled for the final moment.

The last minute is approaching. The long line of assailants in front comes nearer—at times crawling, at times running. Soon will be the great hour of sacrifice, the carnage amidst the rush of hand-to-hand fighting, and the tumult of the grenades.

The defence becomes mechanical, instinctive, and desperate. It is almost with indifference that we hear the first report of the cannon behind us—the liberating cannon of the French! But, immediately afterward, we feel the intoxicating joy of the unexpected deliverance, of

salvation, of the end of our mortal anguish. We must still fight, but now it is with the powerful help of our irresistible gun.

How sweet is the song of our shells and how precise and efficacious is the aid given. Almost immediately the invisible machine guns cease their chattering and their destruction is followed by the annihilation of the long assaulting column. They are still threatening and they struggle desperately—these men who thought they had us at their mercy—but it is now the minute of the last sacrifice for them. Pitilessly and regularly the terrible volleys of our "75's" toll their death knell.

IX

In Squadron

A SHRILL wind ravels the gray clouds in a murky sky. A diffuse light adds its sadness to the forbiddingness of the surroundings.

One by one the planes coming from the four corners of the sky have returned home. They appear out of the mist on the horizon and swiftly approach, filling the air with the joyous song of their engines; then they become silent—dive downward in spirals, and finally touch the ground.

Soon the entire squadron has assembled. The pilots and passengers go to report while the groundmen look after the machines.

The duties of this short autumnal day seem to have been completed. To-morrow at early dawn we shall resume our war work; now it is the hour of rest.

All of a sudden a distant buzzing halts the scattering airmen and makes them look upward.

Is it a German? All eyes vainly search the gray, indistinct sky; then someone cries: "There he is, there he is!" Another instant elapses and we all recognize the solitary airplane; it is L——! The outline of an elegant monoplane is seen against a clear zone in the sky, it is so plain that it can be recognized in spite of the distance.

He descends slowly until able to make out the ground, then cuts the ignition and lands. We all run to him. L—— must bring important news, for every day, from dawn to evening, in all sorts of weather, he roams the clouds. He lives up there and only comes down to signal what he has observed that is interesting.

This time he comes to tell us that a very large convoy—munitions, no doubt—is coming along a little branch line about fifty kilometres to the northeast, and that the houses in its neighbourhood are probably sheltering some important people judging by the large automobile convoy imperfectly hidden near-by.

L—— adds that here is a good opportunity to utilize the end of the day, and, for himself, asks only to be our companion and guide.

It does not take long. While the commandant is telephoning to General Headquarters we get ready for the departure and soon, one by one, our planes take to the air, following the

squadron commander. A short distance ahead L——'s little monoplane leads the way.

Our eyes glued on the leader we increase the speed and ascend. Under us the deserted countryside, with its white and russet chalk formations, unrolls itself.

Before we have had time to distinguish precisely anything below, a great flame rises from the ground and a great gust of air displaces us. The head of our aërial column has just blown up something but still we see nothing.

We can investigate by going downward! With great prudence we slide toward the ground—our engine stopped, so that we may listen. The one in front of us has done the same and has just thrown his bombs, for we now see white bursts of smoke here and there. We continue to descend straining all our senses.

Suddenly we see. The wrecked engine of a train lies on the side of an embankment; behind it is a nondescript mass from which flames and smoke are issuing. A little farther ahead we recognize another convoy which—judging by the the smoke of its engine—is running away. Releasing our motors, we are on it in a few seconds and while we are throwing our bombs we discover still another convoy preceding this one.

We leap forward in chase of it, leaving to the

machine which follows us the task of completing the work of destruction which we have begun.

Rocked and displaced by the great air commotion caused by our exploding bombs, we fly forward, continually on the look-out not to let any enemy escape. A savage frenzy carries us always nearer, always lower; and when we perceive the suspected houses, and the grovelling black spots issuing from them like ants, our bombs fall thick and fast and soon the opaque smoke mounting from the houses shows that we have attained our aim. The chief of the squadron orders the scattered planes to turn back. One by one we change our course and throw our last projectiles while the anti-aircraft guns, mounted on automobiles which have arrived too late to be of service, salute our departure with a few useless volleys.

Below, in the increasing obscurity, the munition trains are still burning and every now and then a great red or yellow flame indicates the explosion of the contents of a wagon which the fire has reached.

Still a prey to the emotions of the fight we return homeward and do not even notice the deepening gloom of the hostile night. The signal flares of the landing place are soon shining on

the horizon. They twinkle in a friendly manner and seem to bid us to return to the haven.

Our planes drop from the darkness and come to rest on the smooth turf. A few moments of uneasiness and then—joy seizes us. All of our comrades have returned.

X

Cordial Servitude

SERVICE! This word can be applied in all the nobility of its military sense to the relations between the pilot and his mechanician.

While observant of the strictest discipline there is between them a feeling of sublime fraternity of arms, of deferential and trusting affection, of devotion, of companionship without pride or humility. When some day I shall relate the exploits of my faithful *mecano* there will be reason for the entire corps of air mechanics to feel a legitimate pride. They deserve our praise; their achievements are founded on intelligence, knowledge, skill, and courage. Both in the heroic early days of flying and now in those of war we are indebted to them equally with the inventors and the first intrepid pilots.

Like the equerries of the musketeers of old, most of them have accompanied their masters to the war and that is why we find Ernest in the

blue costume of the *sapeur* waiting in the empty hangar for the return of L——, his master, who is roaming the clouds.

One by one the planes come back and the hangars are closed. The gray light of the autumnal day becomes livid and cold; very soon it will be dusk.

As the hours go by Ernest's face hollows with growing anxiety. Gradually the field becomes empty.

A belated machine appears almost lost in the distant sky. It approaches and then in an oblique flight dives to the ground noiselessly. The sapeurs roll it in and go. The solitude becomes more depressing and hostile. Ernest continues to stand in front of his empty hangar, and his anxious wait becomes tragic.

Suddenly in the empty aerodrome one of the large automobiles from the convoy appears; it comes toward us, jumping in the puddles, the water splashing all around it.

Ernest stops the chauffeur and questions him. The latter—simple and rough, but sympathetic at the bottom of his heart—answers:

"Your chief must have been brought down near C——. I met Prosper who was convoying a Voisin on the road; it had had a close call but had escaped. There were two or three nasty

Albatrosses after one of ours which was limping along near the ground. Prosper couldn't recognize him. It was probably your chief, as the others have returned."

Ernest became very pale and held on to the automobile. But his eyes lighted up. All trace of emotion gone, he calmly said to the chauffeur:

"Leave your 'bus here!"

And, turning to me:

"Don't you want to go with me over there and see? With *you* the captain will surely allow me to go."

A few minutes later, carrying the necessary permissions, we, in our turn, are bumping over the puddles of the cut-up roads. Ernest, holding the steering wheel, his face set, drives crazily. It is dusk and the country about us is deserted.

Suddenly—with a blow from his horn to call my attention, but without changing his speed—Ernest shows me with a sign of his head a great Albatross flying very high. It passes with a powerful and regular flight, too high to fear projectiles. At full speed it is flying home to escape the approaching night. Ernest, raging at his powerlessness against the inaccessible enemy, goes faster than ever. Then, with a jerk, he puts on the brakes and desperately and mutely regards a point on the horizon.

With a feeling of inexpressible anguish, I, also, see. In the distance, inclined on one wing and with a dragging flight, an airplane is making a desperate effort to get over a line of trees. It is L——, fighting against death!

Ernest, his face expressing his horror, turns abruptly into the fields. Like one in a trance he drives toward the spot where the machine is struggling. I emphatically caution him to keep cool and we go on jumping over the furrows and crossing roads in the growing obscurity.

For a few moments we see the tragic struggle of the wounded airplane; then all is over. A strangled groan from my companion shows what emotion is torturing him. Otherwise he seems indifferent as, motionless, he holds on to his steering wheel. But when a red flame mounts to the sky from the place where L—— has fallen Ernest lets go of everything and taking his head between his hands cries out: "He is burning! He is burning!"

Blindly he rushes toward the light until a ditch bars our way. He stops; then jumps to the ground and starts running. His desperate cries—audible for a few minutes through the desolate gloom with the red flame glowing between the trees—are horribly depressing.

My heart heavy with anxiety, I start the automobile with difficulty and try to find a passage. Splashing through mud and water I approach the funereal light. And presently, turning through a deep road, I see L——!—standing by a blazing gasolene tank the light of which is already dying down.

Oh! what a splendid minute—what a joyful ending to a ghastly fear! Quietly, his hands in his pockets, L—— watches the flame lighted to signal his presence in the lonely night.

. . . . . .

A voice still trembling with emotion is singing loudly in the night. L——, the pilot, revives the fire with a kick and says:

"It is Ernest, the mechanician, who sings at his work. And yet only a few minutes ago he was mad with desperate anguish. He came out of the darkness, covered with mud, and breathless. He stopped in front of me with a haggard face as if he did not recognize me: then, taking my hands, he cried out hoarsely: 'Ah! patron, patron, I thought you were gone.' I had never seen him like that before and I was afraid he was going to faint, but he took himself in hand and when he next spoke it was in his usual manner: 'And where is the 'bus?' When I had

shown him he went off immediately, and now you hear him singing at his work as usual."

At that moment a half-smothered groan makes me search the darkness more attentively, and I perceive the figure of a man, rolled in a blanket, lying outside the circle of light made by the fire. It is Henri N——, the observer. Approaching I say:

"Excuse me, old man; I hadn't seen you. How are you?"

"They got me this time!"

By the light of the revived fire I make out two staring eyes and an ashen face. Henri is evidently suffering, but in a few minutes—with his usual calm courage but a voice that is lamentably weak—he is telling me his experiences:

"I was crouching in the passenger's seat holding on to the fuselage while L—— was making a desperate effort to escape. Two Albatrosses were showering projectiles on us from above. Another enemy was rapidly closing in from the horizon to join in the sport. We were going slowly with the engine puffing painfully, trying to get over the lines of trees while searching for a landing place and the nearest post of territorials which could give us help. All the time I was expecting the Germans to dive on us and smash us to the ground with bombs. But

these raiders of undefended cities did not have the courage to try it and, in fear of possible traps near the ground, preferred to stay up there and bombard us from beyond the range of our anti-aircraft guns.

"They were still pursuing us when we perceived a small meadow and plunged toward it in a desperate attempt to make a landing at any cost. Suddenly there was a great burst of flame a few yards from us and the roar of the explosion covered all other sounds; everything was smothered in smoke and noise—even the awful jerks of our rough landing.

"A few more bombs burst in our immediate vicinity with an infernal din and a gale of flying projectiles. It lasted only a few seconds but they seemed eternal.

"Amidst that jumble of sensations I cannot recollect when I was wounded. I remember feeling something like a blow from an invisible club and it was only after all was over that I felt a sickening giddiness, a painful fatigue, and that my legs gave way under me and I fell on the ground."

The pilot, who seems placid as ever in spite of his many emotions, expresses the desire to go back to the centre. We go out to find Ernest whom we hear still singing at the top of his

voice. We cross the grass toward the tiny light shining close to the ground. The cold night throws a silent desolation on the whole countryside. Ernest's voice is heard, then the hammering noise of his tools, and then silence falls once more. It seems uncanny to us, accustomed as we are to the roar of the battles. Subconsciously we lift our heads, listening for the sound of some stray projectile. But no, the silence which seems eternal weighs on the deserted country.

We arrive beside the great bird reclining on the grass. It is still strong and proud-looking in spite of its wounds. Sputtering acetylene lamps light up the scene and make the shadows appear huge and fantastic.

Ernest, now singing mechanically, is busy with the machine. He has spread his tools on large canvas squares on the ground and wrapped the engine up snuggly in his own leather vest which he has taken off for that purpose.

When we speak of leaving he expresses fears for the safety of the machine. With his picturesque and cheerful language he is no longer the same man who, a short time ago, believing his master to be fastened to the burning plane, ran through the night crying desperately. With his head on one side and a shrug of the shoulders (implying previous experience) he says:

"There are still one or two things for me to do to the machine and it will be better if I stay while you go back with the car. I know the territorials who are coming. They are good old grandpapas but if they see the machine in this state each one will want to carry a souvenir to his '*gosse*' (child). They will ruin everything to do it. I saw one once who was taking a magneto home as a souvenir."

With absolute trust L—— replies:

"All right, do as you please!"

As we leave we hear Ernest left behind to his solitude singing in the darkness. L—— takes the steering wheel while I try to make out the road. We make slow progress as we are constantly in danger of becoming mired in the gluey earth or of falling into a ditch. Every now and then a great jolt shakes the heavy car and we hear our wounded companion groan.

At last we find the right road and in spite of the ruts our progress is easier and more rapid. At last I can question L—— about the awful minutes through which he has just lived. As he sits holding the steering wheel, so quiet and simple after so many emotions, I think the courage of such a strong soul must rule over a wonderfully organized body made of bronze and granite and free from every human nervous-

ness. And accustomed as I am to taking my part in the daily aërial tragedy, I cannot suppress the poignant emotion which gets hold of me on hearing the story told by my comrade:

"Last night at sunset the wind began to wail; through the night great gales raged. Dawn was livid and wet and disturbed by gusts of wind. Later in the morning the westerly wind seemed to relent and veered to the south. A misty calm, veiled in tepid vapours, gave me hope for a suitable atmosphere. I started at once, and Henry—having obtained permission—came with me. He was delighted at being able at last to take a pleasure excursion, free from absorbing duty.

"Our departure was bad; the engine was not pulling well. The machine was out of balance and inclined to the right. I had to correct that with the stick. After a longer roll than usual I took off heavily, giving great strokes with the depressor. Impossible to hold in the air; the machine would not stay horizontal; we had to descend.

"After removing our bombs to lighten the machine and regulating the engine we started again. It went a little better and after a few turns around the camp I decided to fly off. We went

along with difficulty. Sometimes the engine failed, also I had the impression that the machine tended to *cabre* and it was continually tossed from one wing to the other.

"At our last landing, near a small town, we went to lunch and learned that two supposedly German biplanes were prowling around in the neighbourhood. It was difficult to say what they were doing so far to the rear. We hoped that they would not spot us as the condition of our machine permitted neither fighting nor flight.

"We waited a while for them to get away—our machine hidden under some trees. It was not until the end of the afternoon, toward twilight, that we flew off—on the last part of our journey.

"At once our difficulties began again; the obstinate vagaries of the engine aroused my anger—that illogical yet furious anger that we often experience in dealing with inanimate things.

"While I was still struggling with the engine a sudden shock jolted me and, although I heard nothing, I discovered an unexpected hole in the sheet-iron covering of the bonnet. With one accord Henry and I lifted our heads to scrutinize the air while instinctively I cut off the igni-

tion and put the nose of the machine against the wind to immobilize it.

"Two more bullets in succession touched the back of our right wing and only then did we perceive an Albatross flying very high above us with another following in haste to help him attack the unhappy prey that we were.

"Fight was impossible; flight, even, was out of the question. There was nothing to do but land—and abandon our machine. Filled with powerless rage but spurred by the haste on which our lives depended I looked for a possible landing place. I discovered nothing but narrow meadows cut by ditches and on which landing was impossible. Behind me Henry was uselessly firing with his rifle while as a last hope I drew nearer the ground.

"Then began the interminable minutes any one of which might have been the last. The two Albatrosses—sure of their prey—were not even firing any longer. While one cut off our retreat (if we attempted flight) the other was manœuvring to get above us and smash us with bombs. We kept searching for a corner of our Motherland ready to receive us.

The projectiles began falling once more. The first bomb exploded on the ground. I had to *cabre* in order to pass the lines of trees, then re-

dressed—with difficulty. The right wing was pierced like a sieve, the engine vibrated and shook our ribs almost to the point of dislocation. The bombs continued to explode on the ground, but always coming closer. Another Albatross appeared on the horizon. It was like a flock of vultures gathering about the dying quarry.

"The agony seemed endless. The vultures, however, were not very audacious. We felt a ray of hope as we raced to the abyss. No! It seemed as if the three Albatrosses were diving to crush us with bombs. I felt like throwing myself in the trees.

"Suddenly—as if in a dream—we saw the little patch of meadow between the trees. We landed amidst the thunder and flames of exploding projectiles.

"Succouring night came to our rescue just in time. The vultures flew away. One moment on the brink of eternity; the next—in calm and peaceful tranquillity."

XI

The Accident

TO-DAY I must tell how treacherous Destiny has triumphed over the courage of a hero, Lieutenant L——, an aviator but recently promoted and whom we all regarded as a brother.

The guns have been raging since early dawn. Were it not for their roar this autumnal day—calm, and pleasantly warm—would be sweet to live through, and the peaceful Champagne vineyard less melancholy.

The Germans hold the hills north and west of the town and their hidden mortars ceaselessly vomit huge projectiles from their places of concealment. On our side a great multitude of airplanes is working to prevent the enemy from obtaining information as to the accuracy of their aim—and, at the same time, spotting for our own artillery. Without pause we fly continually from our lines to the Prussian batteries, then back again.

Below us the shells on their crossed trajectories fill the air with their whistle—then with the roar of their explosion.

At times shrapnels explode in our neighbourhood and we are shaken by great *remous* following the formidable noise of the deflagration.

Our work becomes mechanical and almost monotonous: first, we mark the gun's hiding place, then we return; then we leave once more, we observe the falling points, and mark them on the chart; then we return again.

L——, who is indefatigable, has been hard at work with his biplane since morning. During prowling excursions behind the German lines he has marked the enemy Headquarters and has come back for orders and a new supply of projectiles. He now is preparing for his new mission, which is fraught with great perils.

As he supervises the last preparations his appearance is calm although we can guess at the feverish enthusiasm that underlies it. In abrupt tone he gives his passenger some directions, then settles himself quietly in his seat and gives the order for departure. The passenger —already bundled in clothing—adds a large woollen scarf to his equipment. In the distance the roar of the battle grows louder and smoke appears menacingly on the horizon.

L—— flies off with an easy masterfulness and, mounting higher and higher, describes wide circles until reaching the altitude from which he intends to pounce upon the enemy.

It is during this peaceful ascent, while the way seems free of every menace, that cunning Destiny prepares her snare, making use of an infinitely small object to bring about a catastrophe. While the two men are still enjoying an easy ascent, uncomplicated as yet by the storm of the battle, the end of the passenger's scarf begins to float lightly in the breeze caused by the rapidity of the flight.

Suddenly the picture changes—and becomes terrible. The scarf—unrolled by an unexpected *remous* and aspirated by the tremendous suction of the propeller (despite the efforts of the passenger)—escapes him as if animated by a sly and diabolical will. Blown by the wind it encounters the propeller—twists up in it irresistibly—and the latter bursts. The engine gives a terrific roar while the splinters from the propeller destroy everything they strike. The airplane falls, its rear shattered.

It crashes downward. The men aboard realize the horror of the situation. We can see the passenger—half standing in the fuselage—flourishing his arms while the pilot works fran-

tically with his useless levers. They descend dizzily to the ground! All the horror in the world is held in those words!

We stand almost stupefied; we want to run away on account of our desperate powerlessness and to hear no more, to see no more. The fall quickens! And covering our faces with our hands, in mortal anguish we wait for the end.

The twilight weaves its crape over the desolation of the countryside. The roar of battle dies down in the distance and fires light up the low horizon. Piously we gather up the bodies of our heroes, our stricken brothers, from among the débris of their machine while one by one the last airplanes wend their way home to shelter.

XII

Reconnaissance in Winter

THE morning is impressively calm after a dark, icy night. A dull and diffuse light slowly spreads but it seems impossible that it can be the dawn—that such a hesitating light will overcome the darkness and become day. Over the deserted plain and camp is a deep, uncanny silence.

Gradually signs of activity begin to appear; shadows move back and forth in the obscurity; lights flash up. One sees an airplane emerge from the gloom; its wide-spread wings catch and reflect the light from within and seem to have been dipped in blood. At times a cock crows, but his call finds no echo. The muffled tones of voices is the only other sound that breaks the silence reigning in the still air. This silence of the icy and inert atmosphere is disquieting and abnormal as if it concealed some mystery. But little by little, as the daylight broadens, these illusions fade.

Now it is time to resume our daily work of reconnoitring and charting the batteries that the Germans have installed during the night.

We have scarcely started when the sharp air freezes us to the marrow, in spite of our many layers of clothing. Our cheeks burn beneath our goggles and tears gather in our eyes. Our breath is congealed into stalactites of ice on our rough, woolly helmets. Our throats are parched and our lungs compressed to the bursting point. The sensation of cold increases and spreads to our extremities and soon becomes one of dreadful suffering.

Travelling at a moderate altitude we approach our firing line. All the detail of the ground stands out clearly in spite of the faint light. Here and there frozen ponds glitter palely. Convoys stretch endlessly on the roads.

At last we land near the fighting line behind our heavy gun batteries. When our zone of exploration has been assigned to us we take our observer aboard and start off immediately for a first flight over the enemy lines to gather general information as to topographical features which we need for preparing our charts. Back again in our own lines this topographical map is completed and reduced to scale. This finished, we start again at once and are soon flying above

points of fall upon his "topo." This is once more brought back to our gunners who use it immediately for modifying the ranges or changing the direction.

Constantly going in this manner soon becomes dreadfully monotonous and tedious. We carefully keep above the range of the anti-aircraft guns whose shells explode below us. At times however it becomes necessary to descend. With a sudden, vertical plunge we go down three or four hundred metres; the projectiles follow us and their explosions shake us. Turning abruptly we speed back toward our lines and thus avoid the danger of rising which would show us and make us a better target. Those are the only incidents to enliven our otherwise uninterrupted labour.

After several hours we return to our camp just as any honest workman knocks off work to go to his meal.

And it is during the peaceful journey back to shelter, while flying at a low altitude, that the special treachery which winter holds is suddenly unchained upon us.

The sky has a leaden tint but becomes more and more obscure above our heads while the ground below appears in prominent relief as if it were reflecting the rays of the moon. The

extraordinary muffling of all sounds, which we had already noticed in the morning, increases so that the furious roar of our engine barely shakes the congealed atmosphere.

Then suddenly the space becomes filled with series of thin, gray stripes traversing it and seeming to shoot at us in a dizzying manner. The cold becomes horrible. A flake strikes and flattens itself on our goggles and we realize that we have run into an ice cloud and become enveloped in a snow storm.

As the blizzard grows we descend, trying to find a landing place. The landscape underneath us has assumed a strange aspect; great, irregular white spots have blotted out every landmark and all relief has disappeared, leaving everything perfectly flat and white to our anxious eyes.

Before we have had time to mark our new route with the compass we enter a zone of absolute darkness. All the exterior world is shut away from us. The snow—which is worse than the mist—surrounds us, and Death seems everywhere.

XIII

The Watch

IT REALLY seems like a miracle to be able to transmit human thought by means of wireless telegraphy. The precision and speed with which the sensitive receiving apparatus detects these waves is marvellous. It has even been possible to build such compact and light transmitters and receivers that the wireless can be installed on airplanes and airships. What labour, what talent, what genius have been necessary to perfect that wonderful piece of work!

Sometimes, when we are exhausted from our merciless fight with hostile elements and men, we may criticize those who, at the rear, devote themselves to research and study. But when we are confronted with the results of their effort all criticism ceases and we cannot but render them the homage that is their due. Our own work has been much simplified and rendered more efficacious by the perfecting of the

wireless telegraph and the telephone. To-night we are going out on patrol on board a dirigible in order to familiarize ourselves with the use of these marvellous instruments.

It is a clear Christmas night. The sky is full of stars. The few ghostly clouds gradually disappear, blown away by an icy wind from the northeast. To the accompaniment of the formidable hammering of her engines the airship moves through the limpid but frosty atmosphere. She is travelling fast, pitching slightly. The huge propellers on either side of the cell suck the air from in front and force it away behind in a tremendous current and with a noise like a wind storm.

It will soon be midnight; the few lights which mark the places of habitation on the dark earth are being extinguished one by one. In the soft comfort of their shuttered houses men are sleeping in a security which makes their slumbers peaceful. And on the horizon great electric flashlights search the sky unceasingly. We are to cruise under the stars until dawn. Only a few hours ago every one in the aërostatic camp was resting; the great dirigible was sleeping in her hangar. The cold air echoed no sound but the peal of a few Christmas bells.

Then, suddenly, after an imperative and

mysterious call on the telephone, came the upheaval of a precipitous departure. The solitude became animated by tremendous activity and the darkness was banished with great floods of electric light.

With a hundred soldiers pulling her the dirigible is dragged out. The giant, larger and more impressive on account of her indistinct outline, seems to crawl in the silence. Looming in the darkness she crushes everything with her mass while—invisible, beneath—the hundred men are hanging to her flank. An officer marches ahead crying out his orders through a megaphone and from time to time blowing an imperative whistle. This tiny, almost invisible man, with the inhuman cries from his megaphone, seems like a magician dragging behind him some fabulous monster.

The dirigible is soon standing in the middle of a large open space with her head facing the wind and softly swaying in the night breeze. The crew is on board and the chief mechanics are busy with the engines. They are waiting only for the commandant who is still listening to the mysterious voice on the telephone. What does it say? Toward what destiny does it send us?

On the distant horizon we see some signalling fuses flame up in rapid succession. At last the

commanding officer joins us. A few orders are given, a whistle blows, and we are launched into space. The departure was so gentle that we did not even feel it and the only thing which made it noticeable was the growing distance between us and the ground. While we ascend drifting sideways the engines become louder and the propeller begins to gesticulate in a limp and hesitating way. The navigating officer throws out but little ballast. During the impressive calm of the ascent the commanding officer hastily reveals to us the mysterious telephone communication. A Zeppelin has passed the frontier very high above the clouds. We must bar its route to the city and, if it tries to get through, fight until the airplanes which we will call can come to our rescue.

Then the orders are given, the course pointed out, and we start at full speed through the night. In the front of the car is the elevated post of the pilot who seems carved in stone. Behind him stands a silent group composed of the commandant, the navigating officer, the bombing officer, and the second pilot, their figures revealed by the hooded lights of the instruments. Farther back, in the engine corridor, are the mechanics.

Every now and then, at the commandant's order, the propellers are disconnected from the

engine, which then runs idle, and the atmosphere suddenly seems to become warmer—due to the cessation of the breeze caused by our speed. Then for a time we drift slowly in the night searching the sky for any indication betraying the approach of the enemy. But we see nothing, except the glitter of the stars and the play of the ghostly clouds. Once more we resume our course to the roar of our unthrottled engines.

Suddenly we give a start and turn our heads toward the wind. Was that not a muffled gunshot?

In an instant we are back in our observing posts and we anxiously long for the appearance of the enemy—or anything to put and end to this indecision and uncertainty.

We want to reach the end of this hiding in the sky—a game which our enemy has inaugurated. We must see him before we can launch into space the call that will summon our airplanes. With what joy we will run to his encounter if we can only find him! But nothing; still nothing! Our interminable voyage begins again. At each fresh start the icy breeze is always more painful.

It now becomes absolutely dark. We vainly try to find a lighter zone by changing our altitude. The cold and darkness with our anxiety

and fatigue seem endless when, suddenly, on the extreme horizon toward the east, a rocket rises and bursts. It is a signal. Our hearts beating we race toward it. Another flares up; then one more.

Now we are near enough to communicate by heliography, but we learn—with what disappointment—that the enemy has turned back and that there will be no fight to-night.

Then we softly come down to earth once more.

XIV

The Battle Storm

THE air mechanics say that there is to be a session of liaison work with the "noisy poilus" to-night. The latter is a name they have given to the gunners of the heavy field artillery in distinction from those of the "75's" which make much less noise. How our men know already that our squadron is to participate with the heavy artillery in an attack to-night is a mystery.

Our camp is almost empty and very quiet during this cold misty afternoon. It occupies an isolated position at the top of a sloping meadow surrounded by pine groves, and commands an immense horizon. Behind it, rounded and wooded summits of different height are grouped. In front, the height of the hills becomes gradually less; beyond them stretches, as far as the eye can reach, a flat, monotonous plain.

At twilight a fresh breeze brings the formidable echo of the battle.

From here, as if from an observatory, a staff officer points out to us, better than on a map, the position of the enemy's defensive works and of the railway lines which we shall have to reconnoitre and bombard during the night. The hours drag while we wait; when the time comes the artillerymen are going to signal to us and we shall launch our attack. Until then, we must watch and wait—in the dark.

All is desolate, cold, and silent! No fires are visible, yet some stealthy activity seems to be at work under that outward calm. Sometimes the rumbling of gun carriages or the tread of marching troops comes up from the lowlands; sometimes behind the horizon a red glow appears: it is the luminous echo of a far-away cannonade.

The wait is wearisome! The airplanes stand in a line facing the plain. A groundman watches near each of them like a rider at the head of his horse. Behind, standing in groups, the aviators scan the horizon, and exchange brief comments.

And in the overwhelming silence one senses the approach of the storm which is about to burst.

Nothing yet! The night is interminable and the silence agonizing. The cry of a night bird

makes us shiver, in spite of ourselves. Then suddenly the signal fuse flames up in the sky.

At once and almost with the same bound we all dash upward into the darkness to seek our destiny.

The sky is clear above our heads but the earth is indistinct. With our attention absorbed and concentrated we gradually lose consciousness of the darkness. Almost immediately the sight of flashes of light twinkling on the ground revives the impression of the night. There are little luminous dots from the rifles, large linear flames from the guns, and starlike flashes from the bursting projectiles.

Soon the searchlights begin to flare. From time to time their beams strike one of our machines and for a moment it shines in the sky like a star. Then the shell explosions come closer and jostle us, forcing us to mount higher.

The altimeter marks eighteen hundred metres. The lights below become fainter and are surrounded by reddish halos.

Two thousand metres: the projectiles are powerless against us but the cold is fearful. Below all is indistinct and we take our bearings from the neighbouring mountains in order to ascertain our position. The strategic station

from which to attack our first objective has been attained.

A wave of the hand to our passengers, who sit with their hands on the bomb-release levers, is all that is required to let loose the storm from our guns hidden below in the outskirts of the wood. In spite of all, our emotion is great; but quickly, and at our usual dizzying speed, we enter into action.

Our first bomb bursts: it is a luminous grenade. The atmosphere seems to palpitate with its extraordinary dazzling light. For a moment our two companion airplanes shine out against the black sky. But when we turn to search the ground below with our eyes, everything is hidden by a diffuse milky glow similar to that of a torch shining through the smoke. The same phenomenon appears when the grenades thrown by our comrades burst. It is caused by the fog which is developing and spreading. Our other enemy—more merciless than the grape-shot—is mounting, and when we have finished our struggle against man it will be necessary to fight with Nature.

But our artillery has perceived the signal through the mist and the diabolical concert begins. Henceforth, during a long hour, we

must navigate amidst a nightmare of lightning, thunder, and horrible noises. We join in with our own bombs which we launch sparingly, but with a very murderous exactness. Moved by something stronger than our will, we fly above the crossed trajectories, in the storm of explosions.

Every element is an ordeal: the cold, the night, the close roar of the projectiles and that slowly thickening mist.

And yet neither the desire nor the thought of escaping from all these things ever comes to us; we are resigned to the inevitable!

From the time of departure we have been prepared for the sacrifice and accepted it. From that moment life became mechanical and terrible: to go on flying, to fulfil our orders, to bear fatigue and cold—these are the sum of our possible effort; all else is mechanical. And when an unexpected danger suddenly reveals itself one is almost powerless even to try to escape it.

Presently, when we get back to earth, this long hour full of nervous tension will seem empty of sensations and memorable events. Nothing will remain of that intense moment but an impression of painful lassitude and the desire that the end may come quickly.

Yet the faculty of observing does not leave us —it merely becomes involuntary; we remark certain phenomena on account of their vividness or constant repetition. Thus we remember having noticed that the trajectory of the large German shells was higher and more rounded than that of our own. Once when we had come down to an altitude of fourteen or fifteen hundred metres we grazed the route of one of those projectiles. What a sensation! Suddenly an increasing roar bursts in the atmosphere drowning the burr of the engine and the noise of the propeller. It thunders like a locomotive with its wheels slipping on the rails and then decreases until the time of the explosion. It sows terror through the night! Having escaped that danger we mount once more above the unchained fury.

Now we perceive a large reddish spot which spreads little by little in the seas of mist. The objective of our first bomb attack has been struck. The station of A—— is on fire.

We experience a moment of savage joy then we plunge once more in the darkness toward a railway junction where some munition and heavy artillery trains have been shunted. We resume our hesitating search in the double obscurity caused by the night and the mist. We

are pursued by gesticulating searchlights and volleys of shrapnel.

Once more we throw our luminous grenades and bombs. But as before our signals are lost in the fog and the first shells from our guns go astray. Launching our last projectiles we turn back toward our lines, rejoicing, because now our shells are gradually coming nearer to what we believe is their target.

We fly home to shelter experiencing the double joy of having accomplished our duty and of having reached the end of an hour which seemed eternal. The tumult continues behind us and to our right but we no longer hear it. Only the burr of our engine follows us through the joy of homecoming after that Gehenna.

We search the horizon with our eyes seeking the first glimpse of the landing signals. Suddenly a beam of light straying in the obscurity reveals to us an unexpected tragedy. One of our large companion biplanes is falling to the ground. Shaky and inclined on one wing it descends the steep slope of an involuntary volplane with its propeller stopped. In the flashing light we see the passenger, held by the straps which fasten him to his seat, half standing, half turned toward the stalled engine. Then the light disappears: all is dark once more.

Instinctively I cut the ignition and plunge downward as if to succour him and thus arrive in time to see him engulfed in the sea of mist. Ended is the joy of homecoming! When at last our machine lands, by the aid of friendly lights, the storm of the bombardment is still to be heard. We wait for the return of those who perhaps will never return.

The night progresses, the guns still roar from over beyond the obscure plain. Around us nocturnal calm reigns in the almost deserted camp. Anxiously we await the return of our comrades.

At last the buzz of a powerful engine in the sky almost surprises us because so long expected. Tiny lights appear in the dark immensity; it is the reconnoitring signal which the invisible airplane has lighted under its wings. We answer by unmasking the landing flares and at once all becomes silent in the sky.

The seconds seem interminable. Which of our friends will emerge from the obscurity? Whichever it be, his appearance will brutally reveal to us the name of the other who lies somewhere in the unknown of this dark plain amongst the remains of his machine.

Very near now, the engine bursts out again. Immediately after, the large biplane appears,

glides for a minute almost on the ground, lands, and stops.

All of us with the same impulse run forward on the meadow toward him, one of our comrades who has escaped disaster. Which one? Oh; the anxiety of the last seconds!

While we approach, the pilot jumps on the ground. He comes toward us, buried in his furs, swinging his helmet. And as he passes a lantern, we recognize him. It is F——.

He approaches us in a leisurely manner, unaware of our anxiety and the terrible significance of his presence. From the distance we voice our agonizing question. Does he know anything of the third machine from our squadron which we saw plunging in the mist?

No, he knows nothing. He has only seen the three of us at the outset of the action as we were flying above the battle.

My story does not move him very much; not having witnessed the tragedy with his own eyes, for him it belongs to the series of daily casualties. Besides, F—— is evidently played out. In the light of the lantern I can see his livid, set face; his mouth with drooping corners; his haggard eyes those of a man worn out by painful efforts, nervously exhausted. By using his en-

tire will and energy he has continued his work to the limits of human endurance.

Now, visibly concentrating, he makes his report to the staff officer who will transmit it to the colonel commanding the heavy artillery. In my mind I go over the reasonable chances by which the third plane may have escaped destruction. Again and again I pass the painful vision before my eyes and in spite of everything I find myself listening in the empty sky for the improbable sound of another returning plane.

The hours go by, it seems as if the day would never break.

I feel the need of sleep, of something to make me forget the horror which obsesses me. I throw myself down on a heap of hangar awnings and remain there.

Now the distant roar of the cannonade has stopped. Silence reigns in the fields. After so much tumult, so many emotions, the light fog spreads its wings appeasingly—so calm, so peaceful in its immobility that it appears mysterious.

And I fall asleep. . . .

A terrible sensation of cold makes me sit up on my awnings stiff with sleep and shivering from an instinctive dread.

It is still night, the camp is empty, not a

sound disturbs the profound silence. By some miracle one single star is shining in an otherwise absolutely opaque sky.

Soon it will be dawn. Bitten by the cold, half stupefied by fatigue and sleep, I have forgotten the impressions of that interminable night and I stagger off to seek human companionship and shelter. Instinct only is watching within me. All else is dormant. Under a tent I see some men sleeping around a dying fire. An animal temptation seizes me to throw myself down and rest amidst such security and quietude.

However, dawn is beginning to light up the sky. The vague stirrings of resumed activity drive away the ghosts of the night. The hoofs of a horse are heard on the road, a cart squeaks, the cocks crow. The A. M.'s* are already busy around the machines calling to one another as they work. The sudden roar of an engine being tested definitely dispels the nocturnal silence. It is day.

The orders arrive from General Headquarters.

The sun is rising. The air is sharp. Before we have had time even to loosen our stiff muscles we take again to the air. The countryside has

*Air mechanics.

resumed its normal aspect; although as we pass over the valleys we encounter the same air currents and *remous* that we met yesterday.

Soon we reach the battlefield of last night; only a few smoke clouds from the still-burning houses point it out to us. In spite of the projectiles directed against us by the anti-aircraft guns still in the vicinity we are able to make out that the objectives of the bombardment have been totally destroyed. The station of A—— is still burning. At the junction a mass of shapeless ruins is all that is left of the munition- and heavy artillery-trains.

Then we start back toward our lines and, upon arrival, another joy is added to that which comes from the realization of our victory of last night: the friend whom we thought lost has returned. Lost in the night and the fog he came down in the middle of a glade not far from our outposts. His machine was smashed to pieces but he was unhurt.

After so many emotions and so much effort our final rejoicing is framed in the peace of an almost springlike day.

XV

The Other Enemy

"COME on, boys! Hurry up!"

The English officer shouts at the top of his lungs across the empty aerodrome. The only trace to be seen of his Royal Flying Corps uniform is the officer's flat cap, and he carries his helmet on his extended arm.

All the sadness of a humid winter, all the melancholy of the short, dull days, weighs on this rainy afternoon in the small suburban aerodrome.

Great biplanes are standing in a line, their fuselages covered with pieces of canvas the ends of which float in the wind like rags.

"Come on, boys!"

The English captain is hurrying a team of mechanics working on a brand-new machine just out of the factory. With an anxious and impatient face he glances at the sky where thick clouds are rolling. He explains that he wants to leave for the front that evening as soon as

his machine is ready. Already the hour is late and before he can go the official trial flight must be made.

At last all is ready; the official who receives delivery of the machine for the Government installs his recording instruments. The chief pilot of the firm that has built the airplane takes the control levers while the English officer settles himself in the passenger's seat. The signal for departure is given; the biplane, heavy with all its regulation combat load, rises slowly.

The requirements of the test flight are very simple. The machine must climb to an altitude of 2,000 metres within a prescribed number of minutes and then make a long plane downward, the ignition being cut and the motor stopped at 1,200 metres. It is easy but—and this is what adds the grandeur to our hard, aerial life—those few minutes of banal flying may hold a world of anguish; we fight against a ferocious determinism more terrible than any human enemy with all his destructive machines.

But it is now our turn to make a trial flight, and to-day as soon as we have left the ground we realize that the atmosphere is bad and full of ambushes. The aerodrome is tiny and the rim of its basin is made smaller by massive hangars, dirigibles, and tall chimneys. In order to avoid

the obstacles and *remous* it is necessary to manœuvre, head-on, into the wind. We have scarcely begun our ascent before the gusts begin to strike us and make us drift. By speeding the engine to its utmost we are able to withstand the great squalls and still continue to rise. But watching the altimeter we notice that we are loosing speed. The controls are stiff on account of the wind and it is hard to steer. The whole machine oscillates from one wing to the other and it is necessary to ease up on the ascensor; we no longer mount. After a few minutes of horizontal flying, the engine once more gaining speed, we again attempt the climb. At once we see that it is in vain. As it is impossible to mount in the required time there is nothing left to do but come down. With a rapid turn we come back over the aerodrome, away from which we had drifted a considerable distance. Before diving to the ground we look above into the gray infinite.

High above, the other great biplane is fighting against the gusts of wind in the livid and ever-increasing mist. Painfully it struggles, trying to mount higher. It is kept in equilibrium only by great strokes of the *ailerons*, then it plunges and begins to plane downward, facing the wind. At the thought of the English officer—who was

in such hurry, who has had to give up and will have to begin his test all over again, just like us—my mechanician laughs aloud and assumes an air of comical impatience. Meanwhile, I begin the descent prudently, not cutting the ignition. We give a last look at the other machine before becoming absorbed by the cares of the descent, which becomes more and more difficult on account of the bad weather.

Then, suddenly, a horrible spectacle presents itself to our unwilling gaze. The great biplane, its engine evidently disabled, planes through the gusts of wind—its propeller stopped. It is drifting, and will never be able to make the small aerodrome. Farther on is the huge city with its houses standing out like reefs. But the pilot keeps a cool head and with desperate courage dives in order to obtain speed. Were it not for the cursed wind and deadly drift he would be able to land. We cannot keep our eyes from the agonizing spectacle. I keep repeating, mechanically, unconsciously, as if in a stupor: "He won't get back, he won't get back!"

How the time drags! For one moment we feel a desperate hope: on the banks of the Seine we see a small, free space. In a mad rush the pilot throws himself in the direction of this salvation. It seems as if he will succeed in

landing. Then a final squall hits him. The end of the wing strikes against an obstacle; a shapeless mass is thrown out of the machine, and the airplane crashes to the ground and takes fire.

The other enemy—the wind, the eternal wind from above—has conquered. The winter twilight masses its shadows over the city and smoke trails in the air like funereal draperies.

XVI

The Punishment

WITH our hands in our pockets and dragging our feet we follow the cut-up road leading to the neighbouring cantonment; the devastated trees, the great shell holes, prove that some hard fighting has taken place in this region.

The houses which men have burned are still partly standing while others have been razed to the ground by bombs. Some of the former are already patched up and shelter a humble trade. The village has been spared in some parts and in it reigns an extraordinary animation. Laughter, shouting, and the sound of running feet greet one as if they meant to defy the sadness weighing on those ruins and those charnel houses under the dripping fog.

As we go by we are the witnesses of an irresistibly comic scene. A tall, lanky zouave, wearing tight black velvet breeches, is running after a fowl. He has a fine visage, the noble

bearing of the Gascony cadets, and in spite of the emergency his Southern prudence does not forsake him, for while he runs in this undignified manner he yells that he has paid for the chicken; he is aware that poaching is severely punished.

Other soldiers have joined in the pursuit. Very soon we lose sight of them but their laughter and shouting trail after them like their wake in the mist. This queer-looking zouave must be the cook of some rear formation. With his velvet breeches and red *chechia* he rouses the curiosity of a group of old soldiers who, in their blue linen uniforms and caps, and leaning on their rifles, are waiting in front of a dilapidated door.

Their faces bear a dull expression unusual to the French soldier and we are both expressing our astonishment at this when suddenly we understand.

A man—muddy, dishevelled, haggard—has just come out through the door between two gendarmes.* It is a spy—going to meet his doom.

His expression is cowed and desperate and does not even rouse the kind of interest one feels for some spies who, with head erect, maintain their defiant attitude even up to the firing post,

*French policemen.

and who, one feels, are terrible and merciless. This man—a little latter-day Judas—was caught while accomplishing some ignoble deed for a few pennies. He is not even repulsive, but merely pitiful. His features are set, his face livid, his eyes are full of stupor and unfathomable terror. With pinched face and trembling jaws he looks as if he were shaking with a dreadful, mysterious laughter.

The gendarmes pull down his cap over his eyes and tie a handkerchief over it. Then, closely bound, he is thrown in a regimental cart.

Something stronger than our will makes us follow that sinister procession.

Now the man is on his knees by the cemetery wall; the gendarmes and the provost marshal draw away after accomplishing in haste the last formalities. Opposite, the men forming the execution platoon stand with their eyes fixed on the commanding first sergeant. A faint, funereal light falls from the gathering fog.

The man is on his knees, his eyes blindfolded, his hands tied to his back. Around his neck is one of those peasant's ties fastened in a careful bow. It is pitiful to think that this muddy and dishevelled man, in the midst of his mental torment, has stopped to tie this bow.

All of a sudden a bullet whistles through

the misty sky. The spy—terrified—collapses and starts groaning. A ghastly horror, dreadful to witness, shakes this human rag.

We cannot stand this spectacle. We turn our heads away until we hear the volley fired by the platoon.

Then comes the sickening *coup de grâce*: a sergeant approaches and, with his rifle, fires point-blank at the man's skull.

Among all the dreadful pictures of this heart-rending war is there one more horrible than the execution, in the sad dawn, of this human waif trembling and broken?

Quickly let us cleanse our eyes and purify our souls by the beautiful vision of the sky as our plane leaps into it with widespread wings.

XVII

During an Offensive

THE great tumult of the artillery is unchained. This morning while flying over our lines at a great altitude we saw an uncanny dawn lighting up our positions through the smoke and mist. In this terrifying zone the glow coming from the ground eclipses the real dawn which barely tints the far horizon with pale rose and faint yellow.

In our aerodrome is the happy morning activity. Airplanes land or fly away every minute, and while we absent-mindedly follow this orderly and peaceful animation a squadron of great biplanes, strangers to our formation, appears very high in the sky. They fly in spirals for a moment; glide, and land. Anxious for news we run to them.

They bring none—excepting that the bombardment is raging on all fronts, that there is an icy current of air above two thousand metres, and that their orders are to join our centre and wait for further instructions.

Almost immediately a powerful droning is echoed in the air and a new squadron appears in the zenith. We then understand that a great air offensive is going to be launched and that once more we shall live through the strong minutes of battle amidst overwhelming emotions.

The afternoon is spent in waiting, and until evening new squadrons of large biplanes incessantly land. It is an impressive rush of great attacking birds coming from every point.

The autumnal twilight is short, cold, and very melancholy. Heavy clouds roll slowly in the sombre sky and with the growing darkness a dull silence falls gradually on the lonely country. Then the echo of the far-away battle mounts as a wail from the earth and travels in the darkened sky. It is grave and slow, hardly perceptible and yet very gruesome.

Once more, covering every other noise, the roar of numerous engines bursts through the sky and one more belated squadron rushing to the rendezvous lands at the foot of the luminous signals.

In the solitary darkness begins the watch before battle. At last the orders arrive and we go back to our cantonments to wait for the appointed hour.

Long before dawn we crowd into the over-

loaded automobile which in the damp night is taking us to the aerodrome. Few stars are shining in the cloudy sky and a great activity animates the darkness. An indistinct swarming surrounds the machines, a few lights trembling here and there. At times one hears a tumult of shouts intermingling with the metallic clicking of instruments and the calls of aviators looking for their machine lost in this chaos. The automobiles roar. An engine, as it is being tried, fills the air with its droning.

In the midst of all these activities we have no time for feeling any apprehension at the thought of the coming fight. My bomber and I must first search everywhere for our machine and then we are absorbed by the close inspection of its pieces and projectiles.

The dawn surprises us. More than —— airplanes stand on this side of the aerodrome ready for flight. At the other end, toward the hangars, the small observing planes take to the air —each in its turn. After three leaps on the grass they lift almost vertically and fly away rapidly to go and accomplish their daily task. A few also return, having cruised all night long —hunted out by the searchlights, pursued by the volleys of shot over the formidable storm of the bombardment. These are coming home,

having lived through their night of effort and anguish. How many will return among those who are now feverishly preparing for the departure?

The last preparations are completed. Absorbed by them I do not perceive the signals; the departure of the first section surprises me when suddenly all its engines begin to turn at the same time.

It is the great moment! A last look and I settle myself, my head under the tripod of my machine gun. Behind me, a little higher, my bomber settles in his place and already I hear the cry of the A. M.'s hanging on to the propeller. The last few instants pass very rapidly. As soon as my starboard sailor (as one says in the navy) has left, I put on the ignition; but the tumult is such that I can hardly hear the sound of the engine.

Following my signal the men let go and the machine runs along on the grass, but the take-off is slack; my stabilizer leaves the ground with difficulty and it is only after having pulled three times on my lever that the machine flies off heavily.

In vain I have opened the throttle wide; the machine cannot fly at the right angle of incidence. I must descend, and to do that it is

necessary to change my course—a very difficult manœuvre, with the machine *cabred* as it is and so near the ground! I have hardly touched the rudder bar preparatory to redress in case of a skid when I see a little hunting plane making straight for me. Instinctively I cut off the ignition, running the risk of crashing on to the ground but the little monoplane passes over me with a vertical leap! The pilot salutes me, ironically, as he goes by—imitating with his arms my heavy flight, tail down. What a poor start on a day of battle!

At last the engine picks up and we soar once more. Nearly all our comrades have left—one or two at a time—and this innumerable flight is a really gorgeous spectacle; the sky is full of rigid wings and the thunder of engines fills the air! Now we navigate at a low altitude in the dull morning. Falling from the high clouds, pale, clear rays spread their light on an extraordinary swarming of men and wagons which cover all the roads. Gradually, as we approach the front, all buries itself and disappears.

Following our squadron commander we come to the firing line. From such an altitude all we can make out is little islands of smoke slowly blown by the wind above the indistinct ground, here and there rapid lines of flame, or others,

more diffuse, which look like globes of fire in the smoke.

Almost immediately we receive the first volley of the enemy artillery. Around our machines the air is filled with sudden flames, followed by a dense cloud of smoke. Great gusts shake us in their angry *remous*. At times the thunder of explosions drowns the noise of the engines and resounds within us as if we had been hit.

We go forward through this storm while underneath us—amidst the flames and smoke—appear the defensive works of the enemy, their geometrical outline showing in dark lines or white ones against the indistinct ground.

Gradually the tumult seems to subside. Only rare volleys hit us now; when we reach the rear of the enemy lines all life has stopped below us and the country is deserted. Only a few solitary fires are slowly carrying on their destruction.

Then, almost invisible on the horizon we discern a station, smoking engines, and, farther, a mass of buildings. Before we have had time to mark that objective the head of our squadron makes for it and plunges to the left. Immediately flames rise from the mass of buildings and a great mushroom of black smoke mounts and drifts in the wind.

Events now happen in rapid succession. Arriving in our turn on the mass of flames and smoke we launch our projectiles; but we are unable to renew the attack for we are sucked in a formidable draft and jostled by tremendous *remous*. We roll from one wing to the other, then pitch—unable to dominate this gale. Once more the projectiles burst in our immediate vicinity but our anxiety is already so great that even this disquieting nearness is powerless to add to it.

As soon as I have mastered my machine I bank, turn about, and come back above my objective. Once more I launch my projectiles in the dreadful dance of the *remous*.

At last it is over! What joy we feel at the thought that our task has been successfully accomplished! Our guide already precedes us on the way home, his signals floating in the wind. Useless shrapnel volleys follow us in our retreat, which is effected at a tremendous altitude.

Then once more we cross the infernal zone above the battle amidst the explosions and the gusts of wind. But nothing stops us now. Very soon we are back and hear of the victory of our troops (of which we have been the unconscious witnesses) and of another aerial offensive planned for the following night. Hurrah! All is well!

XVIII

*The "Kamelot"**

EH, KAMELOT, I am trying to outdo you!"

Julian H——, who is always mocking, greets in this friendly manner the pilot, Jean T——, who is talking with me in front of the hangars; then brandishing a paper in his hand he goes away crying: "Intran-Is-Sport."†

"You are very gifted and it will soon be your turn to be the *Kamelot* of the air," my friend answers. And turning toward me he adds:

"That is the nickname I have borne since the day I was designated to go by the air route and distribute French newspapers to the people of B——, in spite of the Germans whom that puts in a rage.

"Now a good many aviators fulfil the same task which, after all, is easy enough to accom-

**Camelot:* a street pedlar. (The K is substituted for the C in order to poke fun at the Germans.)

†*L'Intransigeant* is a Paris evening paper.

plish but to which I owe some powerful sensations.

"On a Saturday evening, some time ago—when I was daily carrying one of the stars of the intelligence service—as soon as I had landed I was called by the chief of the formation whose direct authority is over the aviators detached on a mission or not belonging to a regular squadron. He told me that the next day, Sunday, I was to go to B——, to throw some packages of newspapers which were ready for me to take. And without delay he came with me to supervise the stowage of the packages in my machine. There were of course our *Petit Parisien*, the *Temps*, the *Journal*, and others.

"Having received my instructions I was peacefully going back to my cantonment when an idea came to me. Unseen, I crept as far as the shop of mère Papelard, and, to her amazement, bought all her stock of fashion papers. (This book store for soldiers had fashion papers. I wonder whom she sells them to?) When I got back I sat down and wrote something like this on the first page of my publications:

WOMEN OF B——, OUR VERY DEAR SISTERS: Do not give the enemy the joy of knowing that you carry in your hearts the mourning of the crucified Motherland.

Let your charm, your smartness, the quiet and delicate

art with which you know how to dress, be a permanent insult to the Teuton heaviness.

"On the Sunday, at dawn, we arrived in the aerodrome and I smuggled and hid my fashion papers under my seat. It was a wise precaution for, after a test flight, the commander, finding that my plane was too heavily loaded, ordered some of the packages to be taken out.

"I should have liked to start right away and gloriously distribute my papers under the mid-day sun, but the road was strictly forbidden since the enemy had built several hangars for dirigibles. I had to wait for the twilight.

"Yet, on account of a light golden mist which began to float low down on the ground and spread slowly, the commander allowed me to start about 2 P. M. with instructions to land and wait for the propitious moment in case the weather cleared up.

"He had hardly finished giving me his instructions when, opening the throttle wide, I sprang up almost vertically after three leaps on the grass. I went due north at a good speed over the transparent and sunlit clouds. From below I must have been almost invisible; personally I could only make out every now and then some

landmarks more apparent than others among the confusion of the misty lowlands. Sometimes dense tufts of smoke gathered into shapeless clouds and stagnated in one place. There was absolutely no wind, so that when I came to the firing line I mounted higher and relied entirely upon my compass.

"Every now and then the Germans, guided by the sound of my engine, fired a few volleys in the direction of my invisible machine. But the only plane I met was an Albatross which passed like a ghost without noticing me.

"When I arrived near my goal I stopped the engine prudently and came down from 2,500 metres to take my bearings. Shortly afterward I recognized the town and at the same time received the first tracer bullets.

"Opening the throttle I flew at a good altitude and threw my packages on the city which was outlined indistinctly. To prevent the gusts of wind from throwing them back in disorder against the machine, they were tied so as to separate only after having fallen a little distance. I lost sight of the tiny package as soon as I had thrown it—which was disappointing. As the cannonade had become less frequent, something unreasonable but stronger than any

instinct of prudence moved me to come down lower to investigate matters, so, without giving myself time to think, I stopped the engine and descended toward the city. It mounted toward me dizzily; now I could see my papers in their flight, and gaily I threw my last package—my fashion publications.

"In the quietness of the glide I heard directed against me the firing which was then added to the intermittent cannonade, and when I started the engine to escape from the infernal zone I was overcome with anguish: the engine had not picked up and I was descending—descending all the time toward the guns.

"It is terrible to feel events going more quickly than one's thoughts when one's whole life hangs on a few tenths of a second. Instinct made me look downward for a landing place; before my eyes passed the dreadful vision of a fall—captivity or death. My indecision lasted only a second when, the sweat of agony clinging to my back, instinctively I did over again the movements for starting the engine.

"Oh, joy! At the precise moment when, almost crazy with despair, I saw my propeller slow down and nearly stop—(my death sentence!)—the song of the engine recommenced—gay, powerful, resurrecting.

"What more can I tell you? The firing, the coming night, the mist, the searchlights chasing me into the horizon; all these were as nothing. In gladness all obstacles can be overcome."

XIX

The Stratagem

SINCE the great September pursuit on the heels of the retreating enemy our camp has not changed place. Only it has progressively grown in importance. A line of hangars of all kinds has been added to the few *Bessoneaux* of the early days.

There is also a great diversity among the machines which they shelter. Besides the planes in the new homogeneous squadrons there are the old servants which have been through all the campaigns. Full of repairs, patched up, slowly pushed by their asthmatic 70-H. P. engine, they go on their honest little way and the artillery group which they serve is delighted with them.

Among those old warriors is a little C—— biplane, famous in the whole sector. Certainly its good old 80-H. P. engine is not a record-breaker but the storm or tempest capable of intimidating it has still to come. Driven by its pilot, the young S——, when no other machine

dares to risk a single *aileron* out of the hangar, one can see it twisting its supple wings and manœuvring its tail like a pigeon turning in the wind.

When S—— comes back from "beatitude" (that is what we call the days of rest out of the cantonment) he never fails to make a triple loop when he first flies off to set his heart back in the right place.

Life was going on at the centre, laborious and monotonous, when on a fine evening of last week we perceived a Prussian giant in the zenith: an enormous biplane with two engines of 200-H. P., four men on board, and two machine guns. On the whole a dangerous and a fast machine. The first of the old warriors who saw it made for it, but the chances were really too one-sided. . . .

And yet some others attempted the fight, trusting in that fortune which usually favours audacity in the hazard of a lucky shot and attracted by the glory attached to such a victory. They carried it so far that an order came from Headquarters requesting them to refuse the fight and to put themselves under the protection of the gun as soon as the German was signalled. On account of our disappointed countenances we were confidentially informed that a powerful

machine driven by a famous pilot was expected from Paris to fight the Prussian with equal chances of success and get rid of him for us.

From that time on, despair raged in the camp when we saw the monster passing disdainfully out of the reach of our guns and going unmolested through his business of reconnoitring.

Nothing came from Paris; the rage turned to frenzy.

One evening at sundown, when all the machines were in and nocturnal desolation was spreading over the entire camp, the clamour of an engine filled the empty sky and then stopped. But everyone had had time to recognize the sound of J. P.'s monoplane, when the heroic song was again heard close to the ground. The famous monoplane came out of the obscurity and rolled up to the hangars. There the pilot got out, had his machine put away, shut it in, and left—without giving any information. The next morning J. P. took to the air before any one else and disappeared in the clouds.

When, at his usual hour, the German monster appeared high up in the sky, J. P. hurled himself against him with a deafening noise from his engine.

The other hesitated, answered to our friend's machine gun with his own; then—recognizing

an enemy as fast as and more easily handled than himself—he turned around and refused to fight, followed by the hooting of our men and by volleys of shots. Twice during the day he tried to pass; twice J. P. threw himself upon him from a tremendous height, and twice the monster refused to fight.

In the camp we were torn between joy and disappointment. J. P., perfectly calm, came down and, without a word, went to shut himself up with the commanding officer. After a little time he sent a groundman to look for young S—— who, as usual, was dashing about in the clouds. The camp became alive with rumours and when at last S—— landed—having been called by signals—he directly went to join J. P., and the chief shut himself up with them and did not reappear. Night came and in spite of all our curiosity we had to turn back toward our cantonment without knowing what had been decided during that mysterious meeting.

J. P. started as usual in the sharp dawn which followed a night full of wind and showers. His machine rose in a vertical soar and disappeared among the moving and wet clouds. A few seconds later S——'s little biplane flew away in its turn: there was nothing overwhelming about its *élan*, and as soon as it had left the ground the

gales jostled it to right and left until at last it disappeared in the clouds.

The morning went by somewhat slowly on account of our inaction and a little sadly on account of all that autumnal dampness.

My observer and I were tranquilly conversing in front of the hangars waiting for orders when we heard the drone of an engine going at full speed and very soon in a clear space we saw young S——, running away with all his might from the pursuing German monster. We could not understand why S—— did not descend in the zone protected by the anti-aircraft guns. The German, who was gaining on him, began to shoot almost at once. We thought poor S—— was lost and wondered why he had allowed the enemy to come so near.

Alas! our fears were justified; S—— tossed about for an instant and began to fall like a dead leaf. To try and save him the artillery vainly opened fire: the other was out of reach. As if surprised by his rapid victory, the German stopped for an instant facing the wind and, with a rifle, went on firing on our comrade who was coming down tossed by the gusts. But really there was too much art in this fall; the Boche could be taken in but not we. On account of the perfection of the acting we recog-

nized the favourite trick of our dear little S——, and then we stamped our feet with sheer joy.

While the German blindly continued firing on the "defeated" plane the thunder of J. P.'s engine and machine gun burst out above him in the clouds.

We could see the monoplane dashing down on the monster. The latter also understood—but it was too late! He had to mount in order to get out of the range of the guns and also he had to escape the attack of our hero. For one moment he hesitated—and then the end came immediately: the Boche oscillated—plunged heavily, nose down—caught fire—and crashed to the ground.

J. P. cut off his engine and slowly spun around his prey to make sure of his victory. Then he opened the throttle and disappeared in the sky.

Young S——, whom we had forgotten during the tragic struggle, also came back over the scene of the fight. When he saw the result of it he showed his satisfaction by making a triple loop with calmness and poise.

XX

The Christmas Visit

THE cold, starry Christmas night is nearly over. At the end of the frozen drive one can dimly make out the grace of a French château amidst the unsightly huts of a village. All is dark, quiet, and lonely.

Our motor stops at the foot of a porch edged by a balustrade. The windows of the house are lighted and a noisy activity is going on in the servants' quarters. The hard, every-day life is being once more resumed after the illusory rest of the night, for the graceful château is a hospital and inside its walls the days are filled with suffering and agony.

At the entrance we are seized with an indescribable anguish. Along the dimly lit corridors floats an odour of suffering and of death.

We stop as a loud, desperate cry issues through an open door. It is followed by a wailing sound, then by words uttered in a voice that doesn't sound human, then by childish

sobbing or inarticulate swearing; after which the loud, desperate cry once more pierces the wall and fills the house.

"Pity!" shrieks a heartrending voice.

Every day this torture is renewed when the dressing is being changed; the poor young officer —half of whose face has been torn away by a shell—desperately clings to life.

At that moment we recognize the venerable Mother Superior of the hospital, as she comes toward us. She seems like a ghost under her white coronet, the red ribbon of the Legion of Honour shining on her bosom. As if speaking to herself she says:

"Before my daily labour begins I am going to deposit the sheaf of the night's suffering at the feet of the Consoler, as an offering, and pray that the worthiness of those sacrifices may expand itself in benedictions on our crucified France. Also I must pray for strength to prevent the malediction, which I feel in my maternal heart, from issuing from my lips." Two tears slowly fall down her sad face while we fly from the cries on the other side of the door, without stopping to inquire where is situated the room of our friend H—— whom we have come to see.

After wandering through a labyrinth of staircases and corridors we come to a side wing where

everything is still quiet. Through a half-open door we hear a voice—virile in tone, yet childish in its expression—saying:

"Ah, sister; the beautiful Christmas mornings of my childhood! The awakening among the happy agitation of the house filled with the crackling of the great wood fires in the chimneys, the yellow sun in the frozen garden, the lace-work of the frost on the windows, the bells ringing in the pale sky; everything—even the perfume of the candy and the odour of the beautiful, multicoloured pictures ornamenting the Christmas gift books. . . ."

This voice, which we can barely recognize as that of our friend, guides us to the room. H—— is on the bed, so tightly bound up in bandages that he looks like a rigid corpse. Only his eyes appear to be alive in his gray face. But how haggard and full of suffering they are!

At our request he tells us of his accident:

"Ever since the morning we had cruised in the clouds above the enemy. Two other biplanes were navigating by my side.

"The weather was uncertain and treacherous. Every now and then great clouds enveloped us; all became dark and we lost sight of the surrounding world. Then suddenly the veil was torn and the earth reappeared, but during those

alternations of light and darkness we had lost contact with the ground and I was wandering, isolated and lost, over an unknown country.

"I tried in vain to take my bearings—to identify some known place, a friendly village. But the clear moments were too short, and almost immediately I was again plunged in darkness among those terrible clouds. Cautiously I tried to escape from them by descending gradually. But it seemed as if I were dragging them along with me.

"All of a sudden the engine skipped for a moment, slowed down, and stopped. Immediately I realized that all was lost. Hopelessly, mechanically, I used the controls of my engine. I glided through the mist toward an unknown abyss.

"Suddenly, unexpectedly, I was out of the clouds as one wakes up from a dream—but *what* a dream, and *what* an awakening! Below me—stretching to the horizon—was a golden forest; and with a pitiless glide I was plunging toward that hostile immensity.

"Then, by the hand of Destiny, my agony was stilled. I fainted and all was forgotten."

XXI

The Fight

THE weather changed suddenly about midnight; the clouds, which had been heavy for days and days, slowly lifted. Now the sky is like dark velvet dotted with brilliantly shining stars. An impressive calm spreads over the damp and silent countryside; the cold is increasing gradually and life seems to die out in that icy darkness. The hours go slowly by in the deserted camp.

Suddenly, long before dawn, the distant storm of the heavy artillery begins. The camp at once wakes up and the night is filled with voices and piercing searchlights. At times a watchman, thinking that he hears the noise of an engine, gives a signal; then all becomes quiet and dark as if by magic and one hears only the distant and muffled roar of the artillery.

The night ends in this manner and a peaceful, sunny morning follows a bright and icy dawn. On the short grass at the foot of a ridge

waits the squadron ready for flight. The usual animation preceding the great departures on the days of battle goes on around the biplanes which, sitting on their tails, point toward the sky the forepart of their fuselage.

While we wait for the order to start the flight-commander reveals to us the object of our mission. It is very simple. While another group of airplanes attacks the enemy positions sideways we are to make a diversion by attacking them from the front. Then destroy all the machines we can get hold of and bombard their aeronautic centre. Soon afterward we get the signal to begin the attack and we take to the air in the given order.

We are going at a good speed, ascending gradually. Our thoughts are entirely absorbed by our task. We must constantly look after the running of the engine and regulate our speed so as not to pass the chief of our file. It is also necessary to stay in sight of our comrades, nearly at the same altitude but without getting in their way, and we must find our course on the map. All this is very absorbing.

A sudden gust takes us by surprise and shakes us roughly. The weather has changed with alarming rapidity. The wind turns to the west, blowing irregularly; to the left and

behind us the clouds are gathering on the horizon.

When a gust touches us the whole squadron drifts with one movement then the planes redress themselves and once more take the right route.

Now we are flying very high; we must be above the enemy lines for some projectiles are bursting under our machines. Although the weather is clear it is difficult to make out the details on the ground. All the landmarks seem to have flattened out; a great many ponds, rivers, and canals shining in the sun are all that one can clearly perceive.

Presently our guide makes a wide turn to the right and plunges. We line up in a single file, which is our fighting formation, and imitate his manœuvre.

After descending a few hundred metres and passing through clouds of smoke we rush into the battle and can see what is going on below us. On the edge of a meadow a hangar is burning amidst the smoke of bombs. Many machines are abandoned on the terrain; two or three aviatiks, marked with the war cross, are flying low down and fast toward the horizon. We have time to launch two bombs and pass over this scene.

We are manœuvring attentively, holding tightly on to our levers and with no other thought but action.

We look for our guide; here he is returning to the combat. We follow him, keeping our place in the file. Once more we launch our projectiles; on the plain we can see nothing but trailing smoke and abandoned airplanes.

The whole scene passes like a dizzy spell. The only moments which seem to last are those when one is waiting to launch a bomb; in one's fear of missing the goal the aiming seems interminable.

Now we come back—narrowing the turn every time.

Our task is completed. Delighted with our results we dive toward the south and our shelter.

XXII

The Surprise

WE ARE going at full speed through the icy atmosphere gaining altitude as we approach the enemy lines.

The large biplane that carries us is an old and faithful servant—still serviceable but a little tired. The controls have slackened, the joy-stick is somewhat loose, and one of the cylinders occasionally misses. That displeases my passenger greatly for the jerks disturb him in the midst of his observations and calculations.

This occasional passenger is a captain from the geographical bureau. He boarded my craft this morning and I am to take him to the rear of the enemy lines. The mechanics who know his disdain for the realities of the aviatik and military life have nicknamed him "the topographist." He has a multitude of instruments fixed on the airplane—screwed on the planking and hanging to strings; there are some every-

where, even under the tripod of the machine gun!

As we go on our way under the pale winter sun the "topographist" shows me our direction on the compass. He is perfectly quiet, surrounded with all his instruments and peacefully writing in his notebook. It remains to be seen how he will behave presently after the explosion of the first shell.

I will not have long to wait for we must be nearing the firing line when a little biplane goes by at full speed. In a flash we recognize the C. biplane of young Rene S——, who is keeping watch and cruising all alone in the clouds.

As we approach I am very much surprised not to receive the usual salute from the German batteries for we are not absolutely out of their reach. Something must be hidden behind that silence! I turn to look at my passenger who—undisturbed, his eyes on a marksman—is still writing in his notebook. And soon, when we have arrived above the terrain of his choice, he only lifts his head from his figures to count for me on his fingers: 800, 900, 700 metres; 5, 10, 20 degrees to right or left. I obey these orders, trying to manœuvre with all the precision I can obtain from our old "'bus."

Suddenly, on the far horizon, I perceive an

airplane coming toward us. I point it out to my companion who to my amazement looks at it for a minute in an uninterested way, shrugs his shoulders, and tranquilly resumes his work. Personally I follow the other with my eyes and gradually take in its peculiarities. It is a large monoplane the like of which I have as yet never seen on the side of the enemy. From a distance its silhouette reminds one of our Morane. It goes at a good speed and ascends rapidly. As it approaches I can see that there is nothing Boche about it excepting perhaps the curved outline of its rear part and of its tiny planes at the end of the canvas fuselage. The wings—very narrow (as far as I can judge) and of geometrical outline—have no V; it is a new type. I begin to understand the reason for the silence of the artillery and why they let us pass unmolested. The other plane is going to attack us without running the risk of falling in our lines even if defeated.

Turning to the topographist I question him with a gesture. I see him calmly shut his book, cut the moorings of the instruments which are in his way, and settle himself at the machine gun. All is well!

By a few rapid signs I explain our tactics to him while he takes off his big gloves, his face

wearing a kindly smile instead of its usual roguish expression.

The whole thing is simple: his propeller preventing the pilot of the enemy monoplane from firing ahead he is going to dash straight for us, offering in this manner the smallest possible surface to our bullets; then, when he is within range, he will come to the side of us, unmask his machine gun, and begin to fire.

This time I do not feel my usual anxiety, the madness which used to send me forward with the dread of not thinking fast enough—of being outwitted by a terrible destiny. This time I clearly see the order in which to manœuvre while I watch the approaching enemy attentively and calmly.

He rushes toward us and just as I am going to lift my hand to start the firing I feel the sudden jerk caused by a bullet hitting the machine. Then more projectiles arrive while, behind me, the machine gun crackles without interruption. When we arrive abreast of the enemy, so near that the *remous* in his wake sways us, I understand that he is firing straight in front of him! As the enemy plane passes us I see the pilot alone on board, bent on his controls. Before I have had time to prepare my defence he turns around and begins firing once more.

The fight is not equal; we realize that we are lost. The other plane—more rapid and easier to handle with its machine gun in the axis—is going to bring us down. I turn to the captain to tell him to cease firing and cry in the wind:

"*Lost!*"

He understands the words on my lips. Making no sign, desperately holding on to his machine gun, he watches the enemy who is coming back toward us firing all the time. At the same moment I turn about and dive suddenly. The other dives also and passes us, carried away by his *élan*. Immediately he starts to turn around but redresses, hesitates a moment, and flies away—descending while the captain pursues him with bullets.

Before I have had time to relax and rejoice I see young René S—— dive down from above and fly in spirals around the still-hesitating enemy. Going sideways like a crab S—— makes for him, firing in his oblique course. This means salvation for us and my heart leaps to the point of suffocation.

The Boche wavers an instant and faces his assailant, but as we are going to the rescue he drops a few hundred metres and finally flies away.

Having come back toward us, S—— im-

periously points to the way of retreat. Other enemy airplanes show themselves on the horizon and soon the sky is filled with explosions. The Boches have brought some guns mounted on automobiles and are pursuing us with their shells while we mount higher, with great difficulty.

Luckily the soft vapours gathering to the south and the west of us are approaching. We hide in those providential clouds while the explosions get nearer and more frequent.

We are now travelling through the mist with the help of the compass. The topographist, who has proved himself such an able machine gunner, is calmly readjusting the strings of his instruments; and when, on landing, I speak of the rescuing craft and its miraculous intervention, he looks at me, sideways, grumbling:

"Darn it all! I haven't marked out geometrically the angle of the trajectory, hill 57 to hill 128."

XXIII

Those Who Defend Paris

DO YOU remember how you made fun of me when I was appointed to the defence of Paris and its fortifications? You called me an *embusque,** son of an *embusque;* you said I was favoured by the gods and by men and that I was in clover."

V—— is reading a letter in the middle of a laughing group:

And you, Jules, you scorned the advantages that were going to be my lot: nearness to Paris, where one goes and makes a show of the gold wings embroidered on one's uniform (which would be the cause of many a declaration of love), intercourse with the great civil chiefs, their wives, and daughters; rest in the lap of luxury. At the end you gave me up to self-satisfaction and obesity. In the front squadrons, you said, we are meanwhile exposed to the German bullets and to every risk.

Well, boys, all these hoped-for joys were dispersed by the Aquilin of sombre reality.

First of all, the proximity to Paris which one makes so

**Embusque* (ambushed) is a name given to the men who have intrigued to stay at the rear, holding a job free from risk.

much of is a myth, an illusion. I know that on board our 'busses we can't rise an inch without seeing the great city appear on the horizon like a hostile ocean. But when on landing we want to go there for a short time it becomes more inaccessible than the Himalayas.

I won't say a word of the great chiefs, but you must know that. . . .

The audience stands in a circle around V—— who is making everyone laugh. He is reading, standing on the short grass by the side of the great airplanes. The letter is amusing and witty, its style is a little forced and paradoxical, but at times enthusiasm pierces through the exaggeration of the tone.

. . . Above the city the atmosphere is slack, fuliginous, and shaken by *remous*. When sailing over the ocean of roofs at the mercy of the engine, I assure you we wish we were far away from Paris. The other day I went through a terribly anxious time on that account. Blown on the city by a gust, nearly out of gasolene, losing altitude at each *remous*, I had to throw myself toward the small landing of I——, within my heart the fear of not making my glide long enough on account of all these gusts which were jostling me. That race down toward the abyss gives one an awful impression and if the other day you could have seen J. B. playing hide and seek with the chimneys of Montsouris, before barely making the landing, you would prefer the trees and the bushes of the fields as obstacles. . . .

The voice of the reader becomes slower and graver as the letter relates the stirring minutes of the bombardment of Paris by Zeppelins.

. . . Already the watch airplanes have disappeared in the mist and one can hear them sailing high up above the clouds when the alarm is given at an unexpected moment. The camp at once fills with a silent animation growing from minute to minute as the watch posts signal the airship on its way. The squadrons of the periphery are passing at full speed in the dark, falling back around Paris. When we take to the air I first see, shining here and there, the straggling lights of the suburbs; then the black hole which is Paris, streaked with the rays of the searchlights. And very soon all is enveloped with fog. Then, with a tremendous *élan*, we rush forward in spite of the fact that we are as helpless as blind men. In the indistinct immensity we perceive only a few halos made by the refractory rays of the powerless searchlights.

We go at a great speed, relying only on our compass—for we can see nothing in the opaque sky or on the earth, covered with mist. Instinctively shuddering we go on, tormented by the fear of colliding with a comrade following the same route. The only thing which keeps us going is the hope of meeting the enemy and beginning the fight!

Such an uncertain fight! We must stay out of reach of the adversary until he is clear of the Paris zone and then face his machine guns. There can be no possible succour from below. The gunners are blinded by the mist and there are too many French planes cruising about to fire at random.

Suddenly we see a large spark falling in spirals; and, high up against the dark sky, an oblong object—a fleeting apparition—gliding at full speed toward the northeast!

Ah, my friends, with what ardour—with what anxious rage—after signalling to my machine gunner, I threw myself in the wake of the apparition!

A comrade, very high above me, has at once thrown a lighting fuse and all disappears around me on account of its blinding light. When the parachute at last lets the fuse

fall I am so dazed that I can see nothing more: all is obscure and empty.

After a few moments of useless search I must descend and that is not done without much difficulty. In spite of all the precautions taken I have to work hard to make land without an accident.

Now, on the ground, standing by our replenished machines, we wait for Destiny to award us our revenge after those minutes of effort which, as Chance would have it, were rendered useless.

The airplanes, which are cruising in the dark, one or two at a time, try for the landing and alight after some hesitation.

Suddenly we hear the noise of an engine near by. A machine descends at full speed. Scared, we look on—expecting a terrible fall. But with a powerful and sure hand our comrade has redressed exactly at the right minute and is now going fast toward the hangars, almost lifted off the ground. Before his machine has quite stopped he stands up, and holding his hands as a speaking trumpet, cries: "Quick! some gasolene—the coward is running away, but I must get him just the same. Gasolene—darn it all!"

XXIV

S. S. R. 58

WE ALWAYS call him the provost marshal's "ace." But this familiar nickname does not appear in the report which has to be handed in after each mission we accomplish with him. Invariably the report begins thus:

By order of monsieur le . . . . . commanding the aërial formation of No. . . . Army, Army Corps, Division or Territory, executing the orders enclosed in writing, or (here giving a summary of them), verbal, I started at —— . . . M., having on board the craft, biplane C. No. 003, the "Sieur Service de Reseignements* 58" by . . . . weather, wind . . . . of . . . . metres . . . . etc., etc.

None of us would think of translating this complicated description (the abbreviation being S. S. R. 58) into the more simple—and, after all, deserved—appellation of spy. For that word, which sounds so unpleasant to French ears, brings to one's mind the hypocritical appearance

*Intelligence department.

—something low, sly, and underhand—inseparable from a Boche face.

Our spy has a clear-cut profile, a straight look in his eyes, and a proud and viril bearing. Under the disguise of a peasant he retains an elegant and supple appearance. Everything about him betrays the son of France—well born, well balanced, imbued with our good French culture—sound, clear, and strong!

The affectionate and almost respectful regard showed him by his chiefs, who often shake hands with him in front of everyone; his sure judgment; his calmness in the face of danger; the mystery of his romantic, perilous, and adventurous life have made him dear to us. We feel for him a queer and paradoxical friendship but it is extremely solid and sincere!

His middle age among our juvenile mirth, and a distant and somewhat proud reserve, seem to isolate him. His enigmatical face wears a sad expression, but if one begins to speak of the Teutons' cruelty his impassive visage hardens, his eyes shine with hatred and give him an impression of avenging ferocity. One understands then that this man has endured an inhuman suffering and that he has devoted his life to the work of a justiciary.

In spite of our collaboration we never know

what is this work for which he has abandoned everything, even his name! Our share in the mission is to take the agent S. S. R. 58 behind the enemy line in our airplane, to land him there and come back for him at a given place—from which he signals to us with a tiny light visible only from the sky. A very simple code allows him to communicate with us and make another rendezvous in case the enemy makes the first one impossible. All else is mysterious and full of unknown perils.

Sometimes—in spite of the dusk, of propitious clouds, and of our patient stratagems—we must fly before the tenacious pursuit of the enemy and resume our attempt on another side, our orders being to refuse the fight. During our last expedition the enemy did not start the obstinate pursuit which usually hems us in as soon as we have passed the storm of the firing line.

We cruised at a tremendous altitude in an icy atmosphere waiting for the first gleam of dawn to reconnoitre the ground and dive down almost vertically. The paling sky was empty and nothing could be distinguished in the indistinct ground. Although we were very far behind the firing line there was a mysterious calm; it was uncanny and anguishing.

At last a livid light fell from the clearing sky and with a feverish haste we landed somewhat roughly in the midst of a great empty space.

As soon as we had landed my companion seized the tail of the machine to turn it around and at that minute the engine pancaked. In one leap he was hanging on to the propeller, but during the sudden silence I had time to listen to the echoes. There was nothing to be heard: no galloping on the distant roads; no churn of engine, either on the ground or in the sky; no cannonade, no musketry. But S. S. R. 58's face expressed great anxiety and he said quickly:

"All that hides a trap. Be very prudent when you come for me. If you see the red signal between the stones, turn back toward the base as quickly as possible and" . . . (here his face becomes stern and unmoved) . . . "you can say the prayers for the dying."

As soon as the propeller was started I left. The same anguishing, empty silence encompassed me as far as the front where I was greeted by the usual cannonade.

The remembrance of my friend's words and that of the uncanny calm pursued me all day as a dark foreboding. The hours dragged along until twilight and at last I took to the air

with a sad presentiment at the bottom of my heart.

Passing over the enemy's front I was saluted by the guns among a phantasmagoric of luminous fuses, searchlights, and lightning. Then I entered the same calm zone, full of ambushes and traps.

Over the place of the rendezvous I flew slowly, in wide spirals: the manœuvre was difficult on account of the dark and the nocturnal instability and for a long time I could make out only the ground—low down, very obscure, and misty.

After having been absorbed for a moment by taking my bearings from the line of the horizon I perceived the small white light tremendously deep down. I promptly cut off and dived as quickly as was possible in the darkness, then close to the ground I redressed.

At that moment the dreadful red glow appeared on the ground. But I was too near the earth to change my course, I plunged, cut off, and landed. A shadow came running out of the gloom crying: "Go! Go! They want us alive!" And I answered shrieking to cover the burr of the engine which was almost stopped: "Get in!"

As soon as I felt the weight of a body clinging to the machine I opened the throttle, and when a gun shot exploded on the outskirt of the wood

we were already bumping along the meadow. At the same time great searchlights streaked the obscurity. A dreadful anguish got hold of me for the craft lowered its tail without lifting in spite of the fact that I rapidly pulled on the joy-stick and we ran along through the night with that menace at our heels. At last we took off *cabred* and pitching. The edge of the wood approached. We felt we could not possibly pass! Yet we did pass and we hardly had time to get over that emotion when we entered the lighted-up zone which was also streaked with the fire from the anti-aircraft guns.

We are known for our vertical take-off so the enemy looked for me in the zenith with his gesticulating searchlights and that gave me time to throw myself above the woods. The respite was short! I mounted a little and flew in the direction of our lines when, on the outskirts of the woods, we were discovered and at once the shrapnels surrounded us. Brusquely turning, I flew back over the great woods and dived. That manœuvre again saved us, but the glades were then filled with sharpshooters.

At the end of my nervous control, I went straight ahead desperately. In the distance I made out some enemy planes shining in the glow of a searchlight. The shells began to burst

very near and jostled us; it is very hard to redress each time in the dark.

Incapable of a thought, absorbed by the vital necessity to keep to my course and to maintain the equilibrium of my wounded craft, I went on —resigned to the inevitable. When we escaped from that horror (thanks to a providential mist) I landed roughly in our lines drunk with anguish and superhuman effort.

S. S. R. 58 stood by our damaged machine, his face covered with blood. In his eyes shone his habitual expression: cold anger and a mad desire for vengeance, which the recent defeat had increased tenfold.

XXV

A Confession

THAT extraordinary hero, S——, the agent from the intelligence service, is waiting in the springlike twilight for the night which will allow me to take him in my plane to the place where his mission is to be accomplished. His thoughts are far away. After contemplating for a long time, with an unfathomable expression, the enormous red sun descending on the horizon, he suddenly says, without turning his head:

"Captain J. B. is dead . . ."

After this he resumes his sad musing. Then —as if speaking to himself—amidst the noise made by the canvas of the *Bessoneaux* tents clapping in the cold breeze (which reminds one sharply of the hostility of winter) he relates the following story:

"Captain J. B—— was my friend and schoolfellow. We went to the same college before he entered the seminary. It is difficult to imagine

a more even, a calmer nature—one endowed with more poise. We called him Regulus on account of his taste for discipline and the firmness of his character.

"He was the son of a good old *gendarme*, a non-commissioned officer of the old type, and of a kind-hearted Mother who died in giving birth to a little unexpected sister at the time when my friend was already a grown-up seminarist.

"Before dying, the good woman—fearing that the old gendarme's ability to educate was not of the best—entrusted the new-born baby as a precious treasure to the care of her eldest son. The latter regarded his task seriously and, with the help of an aunt, brought up the child. While he was officiating as curate he put her at the best school in the country, and when he was made a *curé* and given a parish in the Ardennes he took with him the old gendarme (who was more like a grandfather than a father to the little girl), his old aunt, and his darling sister.

"He was not severe but not weak either and he took wonderful care of that young soul who was his pride and all his earthly joy. He cultivated that pretty flower with a great deal of admiration. Nothing could be sweeter to his heart and he feared not the future. I must say

that the small and frail girl was endowed with all the charms of the mind and the body.

"When war was declared the *curé* went as a sergeant. Very soon gaining the rank of lieutenant, he was given a company to command.

"He was a good officer—punctual, attentive, calm, and strong with absolute contempt for danger and death. But in spite of all that, his influence over his soldiers was only mediocre, because he was incapable of surmounting his instructive repugnance and horror of killing. When he had to detail men for a perilous mission one could see him trembling with apprehension, his face wearing an agonized expression.

"But all changed suddenly when news came from his village and his abandoned vicarage. The news was dreadful. The old gendarme had been slaughtered when trying to defend the beauty and innocence of his daughter. The old aunt was murdered in the same manner. And the little feminine flower, the fair and innocent girl assaulted by a pack of Boche beasts who ill-used her with such cruelty that she had died under the torture of the abuse. Then her body had been thrown into the burning vicarage.

"When he received the news—according to the story told me by his orderly—my friend turned an agonized face toward the sky and

cried like a tortured animal and then fell into a desperate musing.

"Since then no one was more ardent in his desire for destruction than he. Worshipped by his men he urged them on during the carnage and at the most terrible moment burst out with a dreadful laugh like a demoniac. The affair over, he would fall back into his normal indifference and desperate thoughts. He seemed to have forgotten his life's calling and to live only for these mad assaults on the enemy. His men now would have followed him through fire.

"One day when my orders took me that way I went to see him in his trench. I found him meditating on a minor attack they had just repulsed and the aim of which he could not make out. All was quiet now and my friend began signing some papers, sitting on a stool in front of the half of a barrel which he used as a table.

"Then we heard amidst the crackling of the last volleys the voice of a wounded German—who had fallen in our barbed-wire entanglement crying in French: '*Confession! Confession!*' The soldiers, by means of a hook mounted on a perch, seized the man and brought him over the parapet. He was covered with blood and continued crying: '*Confession! Confession!*'

"My friend had the wounded man carried to him, regarded him with indifference, and then—partly from pity, partly from sacerdotal habit—offered the dying man the consolation he was asking for. The German seemed relieved of a great anxiety and we left them alone.

"A few seconds later we heard a dreadful yell. We ran to them and saw the officer standing up with such a tortured face that we thought the other had treacherously stabbed him. Then taking his revolver in both hands he began to hit the man's face crying: 'You *swine*—you have done that, too, and you ask for forgiveness!'

"Then, with an agonized voice, he cried for help: 'Take pity on me, O God! O God, give me strength!' (hitting his own face with the revolver covered with the other man's blood): 'God's mercy is infinite, my son. Repent.'

"Then in his madness he once more began to hit and to cry: 'No forgiveness, murderer!' while the dying man yelled like an animal in the slaughter house.

"At last we saw the officer throw down his revolver, straighten himself, and—extending his hands—say in a soft voice (I never shall be able to forget the wonderful transformation which

came over him): 'Recite the Act of Contrition, my son. I will give you absolution.'"

Night has come, hostile and gloomy. The man is leaning on the airplane which vibrates to the rhythm of his sobs.

XXVI

Above the Battle

THE day has been damp and misty with short intervals warmed by a springlike sun. With the twilight the wind has come up dispelling the last vapours; little by little they mount and condense themselves into compact clouds which at once start their rapid course in the clearing sky.

Our bombarding machines—great, robust biplanes—stand in front of the shelters on the short grass. At intervals the rays of the moon fall on the deserted landscape, which stretches its vales to the horizon toward the southeast.

To see all this it is necessary to exercise one's will for one's attention is attracted by the luminous phantasmagoria on the far northeastern horizon. There, hidden by a hill, is the impregnable citadel which for days of a wonderful struggle has stopped the terrible advance of the enemy hordes and worn them out.

The sky is alive with the reflection of the great

battle storm. A reddish halo envelops the horizon; then come the bright stripes made by the searchlights with, here and there, the yellow or red glow which follows the explosions, and the lightning fuses flashing over it all.

At times the scene changes, an impressive calm and unwonted obscurity fall on the landscape leaving only that funereal halo which edges the horizon until suddenly the tragical phantasmagoria begins again without any warning.

We are standing around our craft waiting for orders and we cannot take our eyes off that reflection, nor our thoughts away from all that unchained violence. The commandant calls us together to give us final instructions and after that we live through the interminable hours of the vigil before the battle. These minutes—when, in inaction, one waits for the order to throw oneself into the night, above the storm of fire—seem exasperatingly slow. Staggering under the weight of our responsibilities, seized with a frenzy of impatience, we feel we are the toys of an unavoidable fatality. We are ready for anything, and we act as if in a lucid dream.

Suddenly there is a great upheaval in the erstwhile silent camp. Through the night one

can perceive the noise of running feet and the churn of engines. Luminous signals run along the ground and at last comes the order for departure—transmitted with outbursts of joyful impatience—with calls, orders, and cries.

While we settle in our biplane making the final preparations, all anxiety disappears in the desire for action, but that same impression of living through a dream subsists—on account of the mysterious and unusual aspect of things in the hostility of the night.

When our turn comes, a great part of our squadron is already flying high up filling the sky with the brrr-ing of engines and the glow of signal lights. Very quickly we take to the air, and, as soon as we have left the ground, the usual difficulties of nocturnal flight assail us although the little lamps at the extremities of the cell are lighted. In spite of all the care I take to touch the lever only with the most minute precision I feel the biplane oscillating heavily with the regularity of a pendulum.

All the airplanes have now reached a good altitude, the bi-engines in front. With the help of our signal lights we take our route formation and make straight for the east leaving to our left the flaming sky above the battle. Then all

lights on board are put out—except the little hidden lamps that light the altimeter, the compass, the map, and the extremities of the front *longerons* of the cell. Every now and then one also perceives the fleeting flash of the signalling pistol, its red, green, yellow, or blue smoke. Then once more all merges in darkness and we can see only the airplane preceding us and hear only the deafening clamour of our own engine.

We are going at a good speed, the flaming horizon always to our left and pretty soon, above X——, the enemy searchlights begin to chase us. We perceive a great white flash of lightning gesticulating, or a blinding star shining on the ground, sometimes a bright patch moving about in the clouds; then all goes out and begins again a little farther on. Every now and then one of our machines is caught in the luminous flash; it then comes out of the clouds all at once and shines like a star. Then, by a brusque swerving, it reënters the dark zone while projectiles burst all around us.

We go thus for a long time—pursued in vain. We can see nothing of the ground; and when, obeying the orders of the signal-pistols, we oblique slightly toward the north and plunge, we are very much surprised to perceive, at the

junction of a small and a large river, the reflection and vague glistening of a large city. We are above M——, our objective.

As soon as we come lower down a dreadful cannonade salutes us and near-by explosions jostle us. Below, a multitude of searchlights are being feverishly lighted then put out. We notice the flashes from the artillery. The luminous projectiles thrown by the airplanes preceding us have revealed an indistinct intermingling of railway lines shining feebly. Very soon flames mount; their light enables us to make out a mass of straggling buildings and moving trains. Then all is lost once more in the smoke. Calm, attentive, giving myself up to destiny, I take pains to fly over the objective and my bomber throws his large projectiles. Every time, in spite of the good equilibrium of the machine, we feel a dreadful jerk and begin to pitch heavily. On account of the smoke it is impossible for us to make out how our projectiles are exploding, but we feel the deflagrations of the enemy guns coming nearer and nearer. We are now surrounded by them.

While the minutes go by we are capable of only one thought in our growing exhaustion—it is a strong desire to see it end soon, and all we can do is to maintain our flight in the midst

of that agitated atmosphere. At last the remaining bombs are thrown and we turn southwestward. For a long time we can see behind us great flames mounting up on the horizon: that is our work!

XXVII

The Return After Bombardment

THE hours seem interminable as we spin round in the nocturnal sky throwing our projectiles. All we can see on the ground is enormous masses of smoke rolling on each other, drifting together in the wind and lighted from underneath by a dreadful red glow.

Around us the enemy projectiles are still exploding; they give a sudden flash, leaving behind them a compact cloud of smoke. The stars shine very high in the sky with their peaceful glow.

A formidable noise must accompany us as we continue to fly in circles over this area marked for destruction throwing our bombs, but we can hear only the thunder of our double engines. Hurled in the midst of the *remous* and the jostling of the explosions our heavy plane rolls and pitches and sometimes slides as if it were falling. When our propeller is caught in an air pocket the entire plane is terribly shaken and cracks as if it were going to break. When the

bomber lets loose with his machine gun we feel ourselves carried away by a swaying, like that of a pendulum, which augments gradually and which must be overcome with the stabilizer.

Below, new fires constantly flare up among the smoke. When a parachute-fuse lights up the scenery we can see the waves of smoke roll and spread like those of a stormy sea.

An overwhelming fatigue seizes us as we go on our adventurous route. It is caused partly by the physical exhaustion entailed by this difficult and jerky flight, but still more by anguish and nervous strain.

At last our squadron commander gives the luminous signal with his pistol. Abruptly turning, we steer for the west and emerge from this Gehenna.

Now we proceed through the black sky. Some searchlights are being lighted below and, on the other side of the zone of smoke, they regain all their power and brilliancy. Their great, gesticulating rays reach us every now and then and we issue from the obscurity all of a sudden like an apparition. At such times we must dive suddenly amidst the volleys of fire to escape the luminous pursuit. Those hurried manœuvres are dangerous for we know that the sky above us is full of unseen wings.

When by straining his wits my bomber guesses that another plane is approaching, he puts on our signal light for the fraction of a second; the other machine answers in the same manner; and we both change our course.

Suddenly the head of our file seems to hesitate. We all draw closer together and, at a sign, we turn southward. We see a great number of searchlights dizzily dancing along the course we were to follow and the sky is filled with explosions.

While we go on our way obliquely, in a relative calm, we cannot take our eyes away from that part of the sky where a terrible and mysterious tragedy is taking place among the flames. Suddenly my bomber—startled—sits up, hesitates for a moment, and then lights our signal. Almost at once three French chasing planes pass us at a dizzy speed. A fourth one follows them —jumping, gliding, plunging to try and escape from the grasp of a searchlight which is pursuing it.

They disappear amidst a frame of fuses and all is dark once more.

Soon we resume our route toward the west, guided by the reflection of the battle which has tinted the horizon for nights and nights without ever ceasing. Behind us, protecting our re-

treat, the chasing planes are fighting the enemy. Having cleared the road in front of us they hurl themselves through the dark night against the enemy planes, which are attacking us from the sides. They rush upon them with a desperate *élan*—a terrifying rapidity. The struggle is on and there is nothing we can do to help them in their heroic task.

We go on our route almost peacefully, ashamed of our heavy gait. Our hearts are filled with anxiety, for the others are fighting quite near while we retreat. The task we have just accomplished seems so small compared with that of the fearless craft that convoy us. They are fighting very near and yet we know nothing of them and we shall never know anything of the men who are going to succumb in this giant struggle!

In spite of all we cannot take our eyes off the patch of sky through which they have disappeared. The great linear flashes made by the searchlights prevent us from seeing anything of the fight. But soon we perceive a huge reddish flame, like a mass of burning oakum, descending in a vertical line; farther on we perceive another one: they are falling and burning planes. The red flash that accompanies their destruction is so gruesome, and such a direct

menace to us, that we cannot help feeling a long shudder of anguish. And now, also, we pay the price of our long night of anxiety. We are tired out by so many efforts and desperate manœuvres and have reached the limit of our nervous resistance. Yet we go on our way among the lightning and the unceasing fire but all becomes uncertain and indistinct, a sort of mechanical reasoning commands almost unconsciously our instinctive reflexes, and like automata we make the required movements.

At last here are the landing signals. While we descend, gliding in slow spirals, the engine stops, the chasing planes returning from the fight pass us at a giddy speed, very quickly they are out of sight rushing to their landing place while some of their wounded comrades touch the ground with us. Their task accomplished they cannot go any farther, and let themselves fall among us whom they have so heroically saved.

XXVIII

The Adventure on the Ground

THE squadron camp appears sad and deserted under the continuous and depressing rain. Gray clouds, blown by the western gales, race in the sky; sometimes they are very near the ground and bits of them cling to the summits of the taller trees. The *Bessonnaux* tents clatter in the wind and shake their dripping canvas. The only noises are the "Hou! Hou!" made by the gale and the hoarse horn of some tractor wading through the mud with difficulty, dripping and fuming amidst the spray.

Under the shower we go from the field to the cantonment and from the cantonment to the field, cold, wet, and crazy from inactivity. At the same time the others very near us in the mud are struggling against the enemy and we feel a powerless rage because we cannot take to them the protection of our great wings, flying our colours in the tormented sky as an omen of

victory. Suddenly and unexpectedly agitation spreads through the flooded camp.

The insistent and imperious tinkling of a bell comes from the commander's *cagna* and at once it becomes the rallying place toward which everyone runs impatiently.

Some news! Some news! This news brings orders. The division sends word that an enemy biplane has been brought down behind the firing line and asks for a detachment of groundmen, under the command of a pilot with a technical assistant, to pull the machine to pieces and bring it back. On account of the nearness of the firing line the itinerary will be strictly made out by X——, X——, X——, etc., etc., and the men will take their helmets and their muskets. The convoy will include the following vehicles: 2 tractors, 2 long flat wagons, a 2-ton camion, and a convoying automobile.

At once everyone makes his preparations joyfully, and very soon the convoy starts through the splashing water. We know all the passwords and have all the necessary papers, besides a detailed sketch on which our itinerary is marked in blue pencil. We advance under the rain toward the fighting zone, glad to escape from the obsessing sadness of our forced inaction.

First our way lies under the great trees on the rough road. We meet interminable convoys and sometimes must follow a long line of heavy camions. Then our men become impatient and quarrel with the drivers who answer with slangy jokes and funny abuse. At this the muddy territorials, who are working on the road, laugh, for it forms a diversion from the monotony of their everlasting task.

At a signal, the leading automobile—followed by the others—leaves the main road and takes a cross road while the men go on exchanging invectives with the drivers amidst laughter and teasing. We advance through great deserted woods where one sees only here and there the remains of an old camp: a mass of rubbish around a cold hearth.

Then, suddenly, turning by a dismal ridge, we come face to face with the revelation of the recent struggle. It is a succession of mutilated trees, their roots sticking out among the craters made by explosions, or of shelters—sometimes intact, sometimes overthrown—on the ground strewn with ruins. Strings of mud-coloured, extraordinarily dressed, and loaded men creep through narrow passes. We advance farther and come to the entrance of the *boyaux* and parallels; it seems as if everything tried to con-

ceal and hide itself to approach the terrible line of fire.

When we begin to hear the dreadful voice of the gun, the men simultaneously turn their heads and exclaim, Aha! as an unconscious reflex.

Then with a brusque turn we reënter the woods while soldiers on bicycles and on foot come to inquire regarding the reason for our presence there—and show us our route (the chiefs of the sectors have sent them, notwithstanding that they had been warned of our coming).

We are now on a rough terrain covered with stocks and heather. Little by little a sharp wind comes up and, whistling in the trees, clears the atmosphere. When we arrive in a glade by the fallen plane the weather is almost fine.

The stricken enemy is there lying on one side, very nearly intact. Guarding it is a detachment of infantry commanded by an old first-sergeant who, immediately pointing to a body lying on the grass, says to us:

"This one has his share, the other is a prisoner. When the men on fatigue duty have buried the dead man I will run off with them because the company has already left and this is extra work."

Then, turning his head around, he looks as

if he were thinking things over and ends by saying:

"You can put the 'buses in the ravine because at times it gets pretty bad here on account of the *marmites*.*

He has barely finished when we hear a shell whistling very high up in the sky. The drivers at once start off with the automobiles to put them under cover and the mechanics get to work while we examine the captured plane. It is an Aviatik of the usual model with its Mercedes 180-H.-P. engine, its light machine gun, and all the usual appurtenances of flight. A complete electric-lighting system, very well thought out, must have facilitated nocturnal flights and landings, and a wireless transmitting key assured constant communication with the base.

There are no bombs on board. Black and sticky blood stains the inside of the fuselage. We tear some pieces of canvas to envelop the body of the enemy who is at once correctly buried.

Then in the sky we hear the growing *brrr* of an engine but the great trees prevent us from seeing anything. The men look up and say to one another: "It is a fixed engine"; then (when a gun is heard firing very near): "It is a Boche!"

*French slang for "big shells."

They are right; a rapid German monoplane is coming toward us; it appears now on the zenith between the fluffy clouds of smoke made by the shrapnel which drift in the wind. Someone cries: "To shelter! Mind the *picouennes*."*

At once our little squad scatters in every direction toward the illusory protection of the camions and trees. What an anxious and tremorous wait!—and how long it seems, under a menace that nothing can remove. We follow the enemy with our eyes. He comes. Here he is! Is he going to sow death under him or pass without seeing us? He passes—and then, with a sudden turn, comes back over us. He is undoubtedly looking for his fallen comrade. We tremble with a desire to move—to run—but we must stay there motionless, our hearts beating fast. And it seems everlasting. But suddenly the plane ceases to turn round and round and flies off. It is over, and we are safe. The menace has passed us at its giddy speed and at once we forget that torture of being exposed to the fire of the enemy without having the means of defending oneself.

Now the infantry men have left and our mechanics once more take up their tools. A great

*One of the names the men give to steel arrows which, by the way, were practically abandoned as air fighting developed.

breeze blows on the clear twilight. While shaking with cold we work around the waif.

Suddenly a projectile passes over us in the sky and explodes in the thicket with a terrible noise; then another, and yet another. The explosions come inexorably nearer. Evidently we have been discovered.

Over there toward the trenches a pennon springs from the earth and is waved low on the ground; then others repeat this signal.

Finally a second lieutenant—sprung, we know not whence—comes to give us the superior orders, which are: to retreat without losing any time.

Our men, who have stayed perfectly calm under the ever-approaching menace, quietly leave their work and we march to the ravine, where the automobiles are sheltered, to wait for the night.

XXIX

The Rush of Flames

THE shower of big German shells took us by surprise in the midst of our work while we were pulling the enemy plane to pieces.

Now we have gone back to the ravine where our convoy is hidden and we are waiting for renewed calm to resume our task. Although we are under shelter we still feel that instinctive uneasiness which we remember as the dominating impression during those hours of passive suffering.

The German shells pass over our heads and fill the air with their clamour—sometimes sharp and wailing with a noise like the tearing of linen; sometimes soft and *brrr*-ing or still full of the clatter of iron; always menacing, and above all, gruesome.

The projectiles arrive on the opposite slope of the hill and, for our men who are not accustomed to it, it is a terrifying but captivating spectacle. Some of the shells arrive in the

thicket making a tremendous noise but do not explode; it is as if they were exhausted by their effort. Others on the contrary, which have come comparatively quietly, burst unexpectedly with a deafening noise. After the flash of red lightning an enormous volume of dense smoke spreads like a mushroom, drifts for an instant in the wind, and then is torn apart by the *remous* in the air and dissolves.

During a calm moment we hear a jovial voice mounting from the bushes:

"Where are they, those airmen?"

And almost immediately a tall artillery lieutenant—covered with mud, wearing his helmet and laden with knapsacks and flasks—comes out of the wood accompanied by a soldier wearing similar apparel. Both are extraordinarily calm.

After saluting, the lieutenant says:

"Ah, here you are! Good morning. I am observer at the F. 04, post. The colonel commanding the infantry has just telephoned to say we must order you to leave this place—but" (catching sight of some of the men who at his words walk toward the automobiles) "not with the cars!" And he bursts into a wholehearted laugh. "The Boches are firing a barrage behind, it is impossible to pass even on

foot, so I will give you my runner" (designating the quiet and hirsute soldier), "who will show you the old parallels which are situated behind the new ones. Here" (looking up like a sailor inspecting the weather signs) "it will become pretty hot when they begin to fire with time-fuse shells."

Then—still cordial and calm—he salutes and leaves us. We pick up our arms and, in Indian file, follow the runner.

The trail runs along the northwestern edge of the wood by the side of the glade. It is hidden from the enemy and protected in an unsuspected way by a breastwork which, to us outsiders, seems incomprehensible and paradoxical. Seen from the open this trail appears to be a bare one, running over a deserted upland; but on approaching it we found it a well-sheltered road, in a hollow, and protected on either side by parapets, like those of a fort, and sand bags. As we get nearer the front, the path buries itself, and very soon becomes a regular subterranean *boyau*.

Above our heads the sad clamour of the crossed trajectories can still be heard in spite of the continual thunder of the artillery. Soon the shriller buzzing of the bullets is added to it and also the obsessing clatter of the machine

guns. Our men instinctively lower their heads when a ball whistles past their ears and our guide thinks it is an awful joke.

There are other *boyaux* running parallel with ours. Their existence is revealed to us by the end of a rifle or the top of a pack emerging above the ground every now and then. A troop marches through there next to us.

Suddenly our Indian file flows back, the head of it evidently having met with an obstacle. Angry voices are heard over the tumult coming from the place where the *boyau* forms a right-angle. I elbow my way through along the wall and am confronted by a thin major of *chasseurs à pied*, bristling with anger, and who, with a furious air, pushes forward like a wild boar.

"What are you doing here—interfering with my companies who are going in line? Ah! you are the sappers who were taking the German plane apart! And you are trying to get away. Well go, that is none of my business, only let pass my men who are going into the firing line. But I warn you you won't be able to get through at the rear—on account of the enemy's fire."

I feel the sarcasm and answer at once:

"Sir, we are the sappers but we are not trying to get away. We are soldiers in spite of the

fact that we have specialized. We have arms and shall go with you if you will allow us."

The old boar looks at me sideways for a moment; then, softening a little, he adds:

"I have no orders, but as long as your retreat is cut off my responsibility is covered, and of course you can't stay here." Then he looks at me from the corner of his eye and, in a loud and rough voice, concludes: "I grant you the favour you ask of me. You will have your bit of ground to defend, some cartridges, grenades, and the dead men's rifles."

Now we are settled in a narrow and deep trench which forms a rounded angle. In front of us appears part of a similar angle filled with soldiers, a little beyond that a muddle of barbed wire, then a corner of indistinct ground between two rough hillocks. The orders are simple: fire on all that moves on that bit of terrain and keep oneself protected as much as possible by the battlements. The only thing we have to do in case of an emergency is to imitate the manœuvre of the unit by our side.

Now we are at work. Alone in our hole we watch with a sharpened attention. The great impression of the beginning effaces itself little by little; the bewildered stupour, the restless anguish, have disappeared; we feel light and fit

among the great tumult and ready for anything. Although the earth trembles under the thunder of constant explosions, all the noise of the battle seems to us to be concentrated in the frantic crackling of a machine gun near by, and we barely notice the dreadful explosions of the great trench bombs and torpedoes. And yet they shake the whole neighbourhood dreadfully when they fall, and all is annihilated around them.

At times one of our big projectiles bursts near us. The explosion, which seems subterranean, is like the eruption of a volcano. We are smothered in dust and smoke among the falling pieces of shell and earth. Surrounded by all this tumult we lose all sense of time, so, when the daylight fades we hardly notice it. The flames become more brilliant and the smoke less dense; but little by little they accumulate and form an impenetrable curtain hiding the horizon. It seems as if this curtain were thickening and becoming almost black. Long linear flames shine through it and while our men fire desperately the infernal wall comes nearer and nearer. It is incomprehensible and terrifying. Very soon it has reached our barbed wire in spite of the ceaseless volleys directed against it. Then straight red flames issue from the smoke. A strong odour of naphtha spreads around and,

while we continue to fire, this dreadful cloud comes toward us.

Soon our machine guns in front become silent. The *boyau* is filled with blackened, haggard, and shrieking wounded; others leap out of invisible shelters, pursued by flames. In spite of this terrifying thing, and of the retreat of the first line, our men go on firing. Already the smoke strangles and blinds, and when the first shell passes over us it is difficult to understand that providential help has come and that at last it means the end of that dreadful menace.

At the signals of the pennons low down on the ground, all buries itself in our lines; only the machine guns crackle. The musketry has died out but the French shells pass just above our heads and explode almost at once in the great wall of smoke. We live the end of this tragedy as in a dream, while the enemy, pursued by our fresh reinforcing troops, retreats with his hideous machines, leaving the ground strewn with German dead.

XXX

The Sausage

AS THE sun sinks, the stormy wind becomes stronger; the long summer twilight will soon fall.

Alone in my machine, on my way back from a mission at the rear of the enemy line (which I traversed, thanks to the fog), I come down gradually to take my bearings and my lightened craft pitches and rolls in the midst of the clouds. In spite of all this madness of movement I am conscious only of the strength of the storm when I watch the speed with which the smoke or the trees race by.

As soon as I have recognized the landscape I turn all my attention to the manœuvre and I go toward the woods of B—— at a moderate speed and height. In those woods is placed a post of aërial observation with one of those great misshapen captive balloons which our men call "sausages." One of the officers is my dear brother, Jean T——, and I am going to

pay him a visit by the air route on my way back from my mission.

This Jean T—— is an aviator who, at the outbreak of the war, went into aëronautics because he was unwilling to serve in the rear centre to which he had been appointed. If he is my brother elect, and loved as such, he is, besides, a friend dating from the heroic birth of aviation, and whose sister I married shortly before the mobilization. Now, returning to the nest after having accomplished my task, I go a little out of my way to visit this fraternal friend who compares himself in his new job to a bird tied by the leg.

Suddenly over an ocean of leaves I perceive the balloon in the shape of a sausage swelling out at one extremity, and its microscopical car. It pulls on its cable and in the gale has lost its usual immobility; shaken by spasmodical jerks like a captive animal, it is making tremendous efforts to escape from its chain. Those who are below have realized the danger and put the windlass in action, for it seems to me that the enormous bag is gradually descending; but I am still too far off to be sure of this.

I make straight for the balloon, my single engine giving fully. The gusts shake my little plane, which, dancing and jumping in the ter-

rible wind, drifts toward the enemy lines. All the time I must mount higher and it is a long and arduous race through the gale. Every now and then stray shells explode in the air to my right; they are followed by a little compact cloud of smoke which rushes at full speed in the wind.

Over there on the horizon the captive balloon is still struggling at the end of its cable and I cannot understand why it does not come down more quickly.

When at last I arrive near it, above the great woods, and glide fairly low with my nose to the wind, looking for a landing place, the balloon no longer descends.

Suddenly I see it mount quickly—stop for the fraction of a second—and then bounce up at a prodigious rate. In a flash I believe that I have recognized the silhouette of my brother moving about in the small car. Without stopping to think, I open the throttle and follow. My machine *cabres* like a surprised animal, hesitates a moment, then starts at full speed. All this happens very quickly, and now I am racing in the clouds in pursuit of the escaped balloon which mounts much more rapidly than I do. The thought that it may explode makes me shiver with anxiety while I am tied to my

plane which all of a sudden seems so heavy and slow.

What minutes! But the balloon does not explode; it even descends a little—and then drifts away in the wind.

Dashing after it with no other feeling than a desire to reach it—to see my brother and encourage him with a gesture—I have quickly come nearer at a dizzy speed.

We both arrive in the neighbourhood of the enemy lines and already the shells fired obliquely from very far begin to explode low down in front of us.

Now I have passed the slowly descending balloon and with a wide turn come back toward it. It makes a formidable leap, smokes a little and takes fire! Through my misty glasses I can see the huge thing burning in the clouds and descending more and more quickly, leaving a wake of smoke behind it. And then—oh! wonderful joy!—thanks to the light made by this aërial fire, I perceive a parachute descending slowly! It falls obliquely away from the burning balloon, which probably it left before the leap the balloon made a moment ago.

And now—regardless of the shells, of the coming night, of this dreadful wind, of everything

in the world—I hurl myself toward the ground behind that parachute that bears my brother.

When, after a rough and hesitating landing, I alight on an empty square of ground it is very dark, and stray projectiles whistle in the sombre sky. Astounded, I behold an unknown lieutenant, dragging after him the remains of a parachute. He wrings my hands, saying, with a good-natured and tranquil laugh:

"Did you see how well I set fire to my sausage? The Boches won't have it now!"

And, slapping his thighs, he laughs again.

XXXI

An Aërial Wreck

AH! YOU thought it was Lieutenant T——, your brother-in-law, turning the great somersault! Not at all; he is now lying peacefully in the hut enjoying a well-earned rest."

The tall, good-natured lieutenant speaks in his tranquil manner while I listen, leaning on the fuselage. I am still shivering with anxiety having not yet got over my astonishment, and I am bruised as a result of my rough landing. We are alone in this glade—lost in the deep woods—and I listen to my comrade, who relates with an impressive simplicity the incidents of his horrible adventure:

". . . For some time I had been intent on my observation in the car of my captive balloon when the weather changed in a rapid and alarming way. From the six hundred metres I had attained I could see great, dark, and tormented clouds rolling over each other and which

soon hid the horizon. My sausage pulled on its cable in the gales, the air pockets ready to burst. Soon we began to turn around our windlass. The drift angles changing all the time, there was nothing to do but descend.

"As soon as, by telephone, I had given the order for coming down, things began to go badly. Gusts followed each other; the balloon pulled its cable. A change of wind having thrown us to the northeast, the German shells approached us obliquely and exploded over the great woods.

"When I saw you on the extreme horizon, I took you for an enemy—on account of the direction you were following. You were too far for me to recognize you or to see if vou had been hit by the German shells.

"Seeing that things were going really badly and that the storm was increasing in intensity I telephoned to hurry the descent, for the altimeter had not moved for a while. They answered something indistinct, which the noise of the gale and the wailing of the wind in the rigging prevented me from understanding.

"For a moment the craft stood still; then, with a suddenness which made me fall to the bottom of the car, we resumed our ascent. Before I had time to understand what was happening to me the balloon stopped for a second at the

end of its drawn cable, then, with a dreadful jerk it broke its moorings and in one leap jumped into the clouds.

"It was a dreadful moment! We swayed, turning on ourselves, and I was beginning to count the minutes when luckily I should be able to make use of the stabilizer. The terrifying ascent stopped of itself and we were launched in the wind at a mad pace but with such an easy and soft flight that I could regain my presence of mind immediately and examine the situation. It was not brilliant. For the moment, certainly, the danger was over, but presently we should glide above the Boches; then would come the shelling, the descent, and at least captivity.

"At that moment I recognized you as a French craft but you could be of no help to me. There was only one way out of it, to descend. It was useless to try it with the balloon so the only alternative was to make the great jump. Without thinking any further I verified the suspension of my parachute and I was ready to throw myself down when it occurred to me that the Germans would probably capture the empty balloon with the instruments and the documents which it still contained. I would not even contemplate such a possibility.

"Luckily we had blown up some stocks in the

morning and I still had a piece of Bickford tape in my pocket. The plan was quickly thought out and executed. I climbed on the big circle, got hold of a signal halyard, fastened one end of my tape to it, and hoisted it tight against the envelope. Then with my heart beating fast, I set fire to the balloon.

"It was then necessary to jump—and jump quickly. From twelve hundred metres! The mere fact of speaking of those moments now makes my hair stand on end! Forward! I shut my eyes and threw myself down. After that it seemed like ages before the parachute opened and then it gave a dreadful jerk as if it wanted to wrench my shoulders apart.

"The worst was over. I descended tranquilly, the air swaying me gently. All of a sudden I remembered my balloon which I had forgotten in my anxiety. I looked for it and saw it burning in the sky. After that welcome sight there was nothing to do but to let myself go and admire the scenery. The landing, though, was somewhat rough; contact with Mother Earth was not unaccompanied by a certain violence!"

With those words the lieutenant burst out laughing and we walked together toward the far-away shelter in the ever-increasing darkness.

XXXII

Daucourt and De Beauchamp

ESSEN is something more than an industrial centre such as Manchester or Pittsburg; it is the city where the German artillery is being forged by a whole people of workmen. The Krupp guns were victorious at Sadowa. Forty-five years ago they gave the imperial crown to the Hohenzollerns. The Kaiser in 1914 hoped that they would give him the mastery of the world.

When the French commandant judged that it was time to make the first attempt on this important objective all the necessary measures were taken to ensure success. The two aviators appointed were given carefully inspected machines and results showed that no mistake had been made as to the value of the pilots and the quality of the craft.

The departure was deferred one week on account of bad weather. On September 22, the weather being good, the two officers decided to

leave the next day. They spent the night perfecting their preparations. The maps, mounted on cylinders, were put in last. At 11:15, while Lieutenant Daucourt was arming his machine gun, Captain de Beauchamp had his engine started and took to the air. No one besides his companion knew where he was going. The workmen of the factory in which the planes were built would be surprised to hear of the raid on Essen. They thought they were preparing an expedition to Ludwigshafen.

The two craft, having left at a few minutes' interval, regulated their speed till they came together, spent half an hour in mounting, and at last passed the lines and flew northward. It was 12:15.

The couple, following the Moselle, got to Treves, leaving Coblenz on the right and taking pains to avoid the big cities whence one can be signalled. They crossed the Rhine slightly north of Romagen.

The itinerary at that place allowed for a possible change of direction. The pilots had decided that if at that point the essential objective seemed impossible to attain they would throw their bombs on the station of Cologne. But they succeeded in everything. Already they could perceive on the horizon the loop made by

the river Ruhr. There was Essen! The iron city is recognizable at a distance by its numerous chimneys crowned with thick smoke. Essen is no longer invulnerable. We know the way and we shall not forget it.

"And you know," added Captain de Beauchamp, "I still had gasolene for two hours when I arrived, and could have gone farther."

During the first days of aviation (which are so near and yet seem such ages ago, when one thinks of the progress which has been made since), it was a wonderful feat to take to the air and to spring up to the remarkable altitude of two hundred metres!!! During the summer of 1911 Daucourt—then a new pilot—used to accomplish that exploit every day. Once, however, at Issy-les-Moulineaux, when operating a thin, short-winded, and whimsical monoplane, he ploughed the field but was unable to ascend—to the despair of the inventor and builder of the plane.

One day the monoplane, which had come to grief the day before, came back patched up and revarnished. The inventor, intoxicated with hope and anxiety, was there with a numerous following of friends and relations. At the time it made us laugh but now we understand how

poignant and sad is the desperate struggle of a man, alone and penniless, against unkind destiny.

The unhappy inventor came and confided his troubles to us. It was the fault of the pilot if the monoplane refused to take off. The engine evidently was a little feeble but, put in good hands, it would be all right. He, with his relations, friends, and mechanics, had spent the night in adjusting everything. The machine was quite ready and Daucourt was going to take it in hand.

The crucial moment arrived. Daucourt walked around the machine, verified the control levers and settled himself in a funny little seat, placed close to the ground, between the wheels. He was calm and determined. One felt that he was full of courage and ready to attempt anything in order to succeed, but two ironical and mischievous eyes were shining in his good-natured, loyal face.

When he ordered the departure a voice cried: "Take care, Daucourt!"

The engine fortunately started at the first attempt, the machine pulled out of the hands of the groundmen and rushed forward in a cloud of dust and amidst a thunder of explosions.

The inventor, who had become very pale,

shut his eyes, then instinctively lifted his head as if to look into the sky. Then everybody laughed because one could see the monoplane going quietly along the field and every now and then imitating the motion of a merry-go-round with a sprightly and joyous air. It was really very funny.

When Daucourt returned toward us—still on the ground and capering in that comical way—he was covered with oil and dust. He was preparing to get out when he caught sight of the inventor's face which showed evidence of such tragic and profound despair that Daucourt gave the order to turn the machine around and started afresh.

Then the laughter stopped. Everybody understood that that man was going to attempt the impossible and risk his life.

As the machine sprang forward the same apprehensive voice cried through the noise: "Be careful, Daucourt!"

The monoplane went straight ahead at a good speed and we could see the great strokes Daucourt gave in vain with the stabilizer. The machine still stuck to the ground. Our friend came back hotter and dirtier than the first time; he looked at the inventor, gave him a friendly nod, and was off once more.

It was too much. Although accustomed to such spectacles we were struck by the sublime grandeur of this struggle in which the man risked his life in his fight against elementary forces. We waited, anxious and motionless.

Then the miracle happened, the red-hot engine thundered loudly and, after a stroke from its tail, the machine *cabred*, hesitated a moment, and took to the air! It went pitching—tail down, heavy and jerky—through the air, but it flew; it flew, and came down again, amidst cries and applause.

That day we had seen a great thing: we understood what Daucourt's heart was worth and how great was his knowledge. Since then he has accomplished still more.

XXXIII

The Return After a Mission

THE camp stretches over the immensity of the plain. Under the strong sun it fills with relentless activity and feverish work.

This camp, which is out of the reach of the enemy guns, has grown from day to day until it has become huge. And for a long time it has not feared aërial attacks, the Boche wings having been swept from the surrounding skies.

The electrical plant smokes in a corner under a mass of heterogeneous tile and sheet-iron roofs. Farther, are the semi-subterranean shelters from which the wonderful new planes can spring up in full flight.

A group of officers is assembled in front of the commander's office. They appear to be waiting for news and tirelessly scan the sky toward the northeast. Every now and then an orderly comes rushing to bring the text of a phonogram; little by little anxiety manifests itself on the

attentive and serious faces, and grows more and more acute as the time goes by.

Then a piece of news spreads through the group: Adjutant X——, the pilot who was famous before the war, left that morning before dawn on an important mission and has not yet returned.

The sun mounts on the horizon. In spite of this beautiful silvery morning anxiety becomes more and more intense every minute. Behind the group of officers a small number of mechanics has assembled and they also are examining the sky. Everybody loves Adjutant X—— in spite of his caustic turn of mind and of his flippant tone. The original way in which he expresses himself is a result of his plebeian extraction.

Now the planes from the centre return—their task accomplished.

The mechanics know all the craft by their nicknames; they recognize this or that machine by an all-but-imperceptible sign—the whistling of an indented propeller, the different rhythm of an engine, the peculiar manœuvre of a pilot. We can hear them say to each other: "That's Navarre; that's Sauvage; Hullo! here is Guynemer coming back. Isn't he in a hurry to-day?"

Soon the bombing squadron arrives in im-

posing formation; then the sky empties itself, silence falls, and we are still waiting.

At last a telephone message is passed, alarming in its vagueness: Adjutant X——, it is believed, has been seen at a tremendous height above the firing line. He appeared for an instant between the clouds, going southeast and fighting against a strong drift; no one was seen pursuing him.

We continue our anxious promenade on the field while the commander goes for more details. The young "aces" who have just alighted from their planes come and join us.

Suddenly a voice in the group of mechanics cries: "Here he is!"

Soon we can make out the faint *brrr* of an engine lost in the immensity although we can see nothing yet; then an almost imperceptible dot appears on the zenith, growing every minute and descending at an impressive speed.

"Steady!" cries an A. M., but, with his usual skill, X—— redresses near the ground, lands, and cuts off the ignition. The propeller continues to turn by jerks for some time; when at last the monoplane stops we all run to it.

As we come near we see X—— standing up in the fuselage; he has no helmet and his knitted cap makes his head look round and his neck

thick like those of a seal. When we arrive nearer we see that his face is purple and congested and his eyes puffed and full of tears. Placing his hands around his mouth as a speaking trumpet, he cries out:

"Well, my 'commandant,' it's done and I bring back the "*coucou*"* only a little worse for the experience. I didn't lose three pounds in all."

Approaching, the commander says:

"And your helmet?"

Without answering, X—— makes a gesture with his hand over his shoulder meaning that the helmet has been carried to the rear by an unexpected blow.

"Were you hit?" asks the commander.

"No, I wasn't; only my helmet. The wretch, ran off with my goggles!"

Everybody laughs while X——, getting out of his machine, goes aside with the commander and tells him of his last adventure probably in a very picturesque manner.

*Nickname for a machine.

XXXIV

The Messenger of Good News

HAVING descended from his airplane, Adjutant X—— tells of his vicissitudes. The commander, after felicitating him, taps him on the shoulder in a friendly manner saying:

"Go and rest, my dear fellow, and then you will write a short report which you can bring to me to-night."

X——, when he hears that, appears stricken with consternation; his arms fall to his sides as if he were greatly discouraged, and everyone laughs while the commander goes away, rubbing his hands, happy at the return of his head pilot and at the thought that the perilous mission has been successfully carried out.

X—— looks at the group of young pilots out of the corner of his eye and with a furious expression on his face, for he hates making out reports and any kind of writing in general.

When he sees me he quickly comes toward me and says (wringing my hands):

"At last here is a man from the old days of aviation! They are easy to recognize—not" (turning to the glorious youths) "like those raw recruits who only know how to eat, drink, say 'Papa,' 'Mama,' and go for the Boche when they meet one! But for cunning, endurance, skill and also—alas!—for reports, they come and fetch us, the old ones."

Darting a funny look on the young men, who are laughing heartily, he gets hold of my arm saying:

"First let us go and eat, after which I will tell you of my adventures." (The aviators on detached duty are free from service until 5 o'clock.) "And——"

I finished his sentence for him imitating his voice:

"You will draw up a report, you who write better than Loti!"

On that remark X—— looks at me sideways with a kind look in his swollen eyes and says quietly:

"You have put your finger on it."

Without waiting any more my friend begins his story:

"Yesterday when the squadron returned in

the morning the commander called me and told me I would have to go and fly over B—— on the following night and drop some proclamations announcing our recent successes. He added that he was left entirely free as to the organization of the details of the enterprise and he took me with him to look over the machine that I was to drive and which I was told to bring back intact if I didn't want to hear some hard language."

(I know that when one wants X—— to avoid taking all kinds of chances one must tell him to bring back his machine intact just as one would tell some other man to spare his life.)

"The commander wanted to get the thing quietly over at night. I protested, saying that the Boches would then have all the time in the world to do away with the proclamations, fallen in the dark, and that it was much better to sow them in the sky by daylight after having thrown a bomb to advertise my arrival and one to close the seance at the end of the distribution. The commander ended by giving in to my reasons, demanding however that I should leave at night to arrive over B—— by dawn and permitting me to take two shells of 90.

"Therefore last night I went to take a nap after preparing everything and told Émile to

watch over the *coucou* as I remembered that, on the eve of Marshall's raid, some one had stolen his proclamations and all he had prepared!" (X—— laughs as he thinks of the face the thief must have made when he opened the proclamations) . . . "What a catch!!

"This morning before dawn I started, in raw and clear weather; the brand new *coucou* went like an arrow and climbed as straight as a candle. Above two thousand metres I found some clouds and hid in them to pass the German lines. I went along with the help of the compass without being too much inconvenienced by the searchlights—which, being unable to locate me, only made large halos in the mist—or by the artillerymen, who fired their volleys on the chance. All the same, for the sake of prudence, I mounted higher and soon was flying without seeing anything—hurled at 180 kilometres an hour through that dreadful obscurity. When the sky began to whiten I descended to take my bearings but, pursued by the searchlights, I was obliged to mount again quickly.

"I arrived above the city at dawn and, for a moment, flew in spirals through the clouds, then dived straight toward the roofs. Before arriving as low as two thousand metres I received such a volley that I had to mount again speedily. I

tried several times until I saw some wings on the horizon. Then, as it was no longer possible to hesitate, I threw myself down, letting my engine give fully, and dropped my first bomb on the station. Before I arrived low enough to launch the proclamations the fusing shells were exploding around me. It was impossible to go on.

"It was then that I had an idea. I went more slowly—alternately shutting and opening the throttle as if the engine were disconnected—and I fell as a dead leaf in a spin, nose down, tail down and sideways. The Boches, who were taken in, ceased firing—not wanting, I suppose, to spoil a machine which was so kindly falling in their midst. To me the minutes seemed eternal. I thought of the friends below (who were probably thrusting their arms up, crying with rage), and of the women on their knees praying in the streets (as I saw them pray for that poor Gollier). I could hear in my heart all those prayers and clamours. From an altitude of about 250 metres I threw my papers in one bunch—then my second bomb on a barracks very near—and I opened the throttle. I assure you I could hear the formidable cry of joy and relief that would be sent forth by my unknown friends in the captured city when they realized that I was once more on my way to safety.

"Getting over their surprise the Boches resumed their firing just above me while I went straight ahead. Then suddenly I *cabred* fully and sprang straight up. It was barely in time, for the firing was getting once more unbearable. Hoping that the engine would hold out—counting its pulsations—I crouched at the bottom of the fuselage. What moments those were! Alternately I held back, and throttled the engine, several times. It seemed as if it lasted for ever and I was very much afraid my engine wouldn't hold out to the end. As I was redressing for the third time a shell exploded just under my nose. I thought everything was over! What a jerk! My helmet and goggles flew off but the 'zinc'* still turned and the 'broom-stick' still answered to my pressure. There was no harm done that time but I must look out for the next! To my amazement the Boches stopped firing and I perceived a great monster of a biplane which had arrived nearly at the same altitude as me and was chasing me. I preferred that menace to the other and started manœuvring.

"The advent of that Boche biplane saved me. At the propitious moment I hurled myself against him and should have brought him down with my machine gun if only I had had some

*Slang for "propeller."

goggles, but with that infernal wind, which turns one's eyelashes into one's eyes, it is impossible to aim straight. After receiving a volley at close range in the rear of his machine my Boche descended, having fired only a few poorly aimed shots with his machine gun. Just as another enemy machine was descending from Z——, to chase me, I plunged into some propitious clouds which were there blocking the sky to the south.

XXXV

The Escort

IT IS a dark night. Very few stars are shining. Great, cold gusts pass with a wail; then nocturnal silence falls once more on the deserted aërodrome. There is something sinister and hostile about nature to-night. I am near my plane, and before starting alone, in that alarming gloom, a vague but poignant apprehension weighs heavily on my heart.

Vaguely I discern the silhouette of another machine standing on the short grass at a little distance and around which shadows are moving. It is the plane I am to escort during its dangerous journey above the enemy lines. It will be driven by one of our most famous pilots of before the war, Adjutant X——, who is entrusted with an important mission on invaded territory. As the time goes by with a painful slowness I am seized with impatience—with an overwhelming desire to spring forward, to put a stop to this

inaction and anxiety, and to throw myself into the perilous adventure in order to stop thinking.

Suddenly, during a calm moment, I hear the mighty voice of X——'s engine. The A.M.'s are trying it while the captive machine does its best to escape from their grasp. Then once more all is quiet. It is the moment of the final preparations. In my turn I try my engine and cut-off. Then the squadron commander comes near me and gives me the orders.

They are simple. I am to follow Adjutant X——; escort him, defend him if he is attacked, and never leave him unless he is killed or taken prisoner.

When I have taken to the air, a few seconds after the other craft, the lights which have facilitated our take-off are at once extinguished and an opaque obscurity hides everything from us.

Presently, in front of me, in the distance I see another star shining intermittently with a bright yellow glow. It is the concealed light on the adjutant's machine which has been put there to guide me.

I release my engine completely with no other thought but to follow that small moving glow. I light the lamps of the compass, the watch, and the altimeter.

I go on through the night hearing nothing but the thunder of my engine, seeing nothing but the lighted dials on board and—in the distance —that queer little star. At times (my machine having more speed than the other) I come so near it that I am caught in its wake; then I shut the gas and *cabre*. When the other has gained distance once more I let my machine go forward.

We pass through the zone of the searchlights glowing through the sky in reddish halos and bright white flashes. The enemy is trying to locate us while the shells explode some distance away.

We pass. All this phantasmagoria of rays and reflections, which the distance envelops in mist, seems unreal, fantastic, and mournful. It illuminates the horizon behind us.

As the hours go by we begin to suffer dreadfully from the cold, which has become awful.

All of a sudden, on the right, toward the extreme horizon, the sky takes a leaden colouring and a pale glow spreads slowly over the sky.

Before the sun has risen completely, X—— signals with his light for me to slow down and fly around in wide circles while he does the same himself. Then suddenly I see him plunge toward the ground and disappear.

Some dreadful minutes follow. Still flying in wide circles I wait for the return of my companion. The moments drag interminably while the mysterious dawn rises. Its dreamlike light seems to hide some dreadful witchcraft.

Then comes the wonderful awakening from this nightmare of anxiety. My friend emerges from the cloud at full speed—going in the direction of home. He has been successful in his mission! Suddenly liberated from my anxiety —care-free and cheerful—I follow with joyful *élan.*

XXXVI

The Rescue

ADJUTANT X——, having fulfilled his perilous mission on the enemy territory, has joined me in the sky where, while waiting for him, I lived through dreadful, anxious minutes. His disburdened plane climbs straight up and soon he arrives at the same height as I. Then, with a happy gesture, my friend shows me the homeward route, and we both dash forward.

It seems to me that our painful efforts are over and that a kind destiny has favoured us; first, because my companion has returned when I thought him lost like those who had tried to fulfil the same mission before him; secondly, because I have avoided being carried away by the drift in the absence of landmarks; and, finally, because we can see no menace in the clear sky or on the earth, which disappears in the mist.

And yet we have still a long journey in front

of us above the enemy lines and we must again cross the firing line. But I have faith; our itinerary now, prepared in advance, is different from the one of last night and passes through a usually deserted zone, rarely visited by the aërial patrols. The passing of the firing line is to be accomplished through a gap which, generally, is poorly guarded.

My machine being more rapid than that of my companion, instead of staying in his wake, as I did last night, I pass in front to reconnoitre, and I come back performing all kinds of acrobatic feats, as if to ridicule his heavy machine. Sometimes I let him get ahead of me; then I overtake him and—passing very close—I make a gesture of mocking impatience, which he answers by waving his arms with an air of distressing helplessness. We feel so secure that we can thus amuse ourselves with these childish games.

Now it is broad daylight and the oblique rays of a beautiful winter sun shine on a sea of low mists.

It is then that, without any warning, the tragical unexpected happens.

During a turn I am making, to come back toward my companion, a dreadful shock shakes the craft and the engine stalls with a jerk so sudden that the machine gives an awful lurch.

Instinctively as a sort of reflex, I cut off the ignition and begin to volplane. When my propeller stops I dive straight toward the ground, to try and start the engine; but in vain—nothing moves! Then, as I fall toward the earth, I realize that I am lost, that I am descending to captivity or death, and I let myself go—almost unconscious. I traverse the mist without attempting anything more, and if I redress at times it is unconsciously.

I have landed on an uncultivated field in the midst of a bleak landscape. In the distance I see a man running away, waving his arms.

Birds are singing in a bush near by; all is so calm and so peaceful that I feel a glimmer of hope. If I could only start the engine and leave! Alas it is impossible, for a piston is hopelessly wedged. Almost crying with rage I seize a log of wood which is lying there and proceed to stave in the tank. I will set fire to everything and then will run and hide in the woods.

While intent on my dreadful task I hear the *brrr* of an engine above my head and—astounded—I behold a plane, painted with the tricolour badge, tumbling from the sky. It is Adjutant X——! When he has landed I run to him crying:

"You have done that? You have not abandoned me?"

Rapidly, with staring eyes and a set face, he says:

"The engine has failed you? No repair possible? No? Quickly set fire to the plane and come!"

The gasolene is now running out of the staved-in tank, a huge flame springs up, and we run to the other machine—my friend repeating all the time: "Quick! Quick!"

The propeller is barely launched when a volley of bullets whistles around us. My comrade, letting the engine speed up freely, "*taxis*" along for a moment on the rough ground and then takes to the air. Before taking time to settle myself I have seized the rifle, but it is impossible to see or hear anything beyond the formidable duet between the engine and the wind whistling in my ears. From time to time bullets reach us and make holes here and there in the canvas.

At a tremendous altitude we pass the lines, thanks to the propitious mist, but when we have escaped from the infernal grasp we barely feel any joy. At the end of our physical and nervous strength, we go, as if in a dream, thinking only of rest, too tired even to rejoice at the thought that we are safe.

XXXVII

Before the Great Departure

YOU must picture the site: the plain stretches for miles covered with short heather, through which shine a few ponds. The waves of extensive woods roll toward the south, while to the east is a jumble of stones and bushes reaching the bare hills which obscure the horizon. A number of paths cross and recross each other in this desert with a graphic clearness.

A collection of scattered and heterogeneous hangars stretches to cross roads and finally, in a fold of terrain, reaches the village where are the cantonments and the offices.

All is dull and damp; the bleak winter morning adds to the desolation of the dismal plain. Masses of clouds, chased by heavy gusts, roll and intermingle. During the intervals between the sharp showers the mists linger on the ground and hide the distant view. All activity has ceased on the aviation field and one only hears,

every now and then, the stifled throbbing of an engine lost in the fog.

Several machines have returned—thanks to a short, clear spell. After the noise of their landing, all becomes silent once more in that damp desert under a cold, hostile, and funereal light.

Suddenly a distant rumour bursts in the clouds; it gradually increases and comes nearer. The groundmen, who are accustomed to recognize the planes by their noise, fail to do so this time and lift interrogative eyes to the sky. But one can see nothing. During a long period this unknown voice howls through the mist and this incessant clamour of an unseen plane is anguishing as a menace.

The mysterious craft appears at last in a clear spot. It is a large biplane with narrow planes and two fixed engines which are singing freely. Soon we can distinguish the badge under its wings. It is a friend and we hear the soldiers naming it without quite recognizing it. It is a Sopwith or a Caproni. No; it is an English machine, or one of the new bi-engine Caudrons.

The visitor descends prudently and tries to penetrate the shroud of fog which surrounds him. Having marked the landing, he cuts off the ignition and with wonderful ease and skill

comes down in front of the hangars. The soldiers—forgetting the discipline of camp—run to examine the newcomer. When we approach, the pilot—a private, surrounded by a circle of onlookers—is answering an indiscreet question which has just been put to him:

"None of your d——d business! Go and tell the chief that the bird for Captain R. de S—— has arrived."

The man thus addressed—a funny type wearing overalls, patched up with bright purple, and high boots of his own make (wooden shoes and plain canvas of a golden yellow)—answers:

"Look; here comes the chief at fourth speed on his three legs—the good one, the bad one, and the wooden one."

The formation commander arrives; he is leaning on a stick for he is not yet cured from the wounds of his last and terrible fall. At the sight of the chief the onlookers suddenly remember pressing business calling them elsewhere and escape adroitly. This sudden flight is so childish—the behaviour of those men so like that of schoolboys—that one forgets the terrible game of war and the inflexibility of military discipline. We smile while the chief calls one, catches hold of another by his clothes and whistles for a third:

"Eh, Jules you over there with the close-cropped head! Pisht, the man with the striking combination. . . ." etc., etc.

He has quickly recruited a team while the greater part of the crowd scatters and he gives his orders with extraordinary promptitude.

"Take this machine to the *Bessonnau* No. 4, Maurice. Put the old machine out, and fetch Adjutant Rey!"

In five minutes the new machine is sheltered in a carefully closed hangar with a sentry at the door and all the camp is informed by those words—"The bird for Captain R. de S—— has arrived"—that something important is being prepared and that an extraordinary plane has been brought especially for R. de S——, the wonderful hero!

In the afternoon a muddy automobile appears, and crosses the terrain obliquely going toward the commander's office. The loafers of the camp recognize it as a stranger to the formation on account of its ignorance of the local discipline and of the mud of a long journey with which it is covered. Soon after, everybody knows that Captain R. de S—— has arrived. We see him go with the commander to the *Bessonnau* No. 4. The famous machine is taken out, and, after a

close inspection the captain settles in it, tries the engine lengthily, and suddenly takes to the air. The take-off is bad, on account of its enormous tanks the machine does not fly at a proper angle of incidence, and, when the engine slackens, it sits heavily on its tail.

The captain manœuvres for a long time; he comes, goes, turns, shuts off and opens the throttle and—evidently not quite satisfied—prolongs the trial. For some unknown reason we cannot take our eyes away from him as we anxiously wait for the end of this anguishing experience. Suddenly a voice cries:

"He can't come back!"

The machine in its evolution has flown off the terrain and is now over the rough stony desert which lies along the back of the camp behind a row of tall poplars.

"He can't come back!"

The machine *cabres* for the ascension, loses speed, and more and more tends to stop its engine; landing is impossible on the stones, and if it hits the trees it means a fall and the inevitable crashing on the ground. We dare not picture to ourselves what will happen with that great quantity of gasolene on board!

It seems it is impossible for him to pass. The machine descends more and more. Suddenly

the captain tries his last chance. He releases the control altogether, turns slightly, and rushes to the line of trees; it is a question of centimetres and tenths of a second.

Instinctively I shut my eyes. When I look again—after hearing a formidable cry uttered by the onlookers as by one man—I see the captain, who arrives on the trees like a projectile, brushes over them, and descends to the ground. We all run to him yelling with enthusiasm and as we surround him we hear him say in a calm voice to his mechanic:

"Émile; you must give half a degree more incidence to the rear fixed plane."

And that same evening, after another tragical attempt, the captain started alone in the night with an enormous provision of gasolene on board to accomplish his mysterious exploit.

XXXVIII

The Agony

THE journey prolongs itself and becomes more and more difficult. Alone on the disarmed plane, which I am taking to the headquarters of the new artillery formation, I have been wandering for hours in the damp mist under the gusts of a dreadful southwest wind.

Soon reduced to using only the compass, I lose my way; when I come out of the clouds I am flying over an unknown country. Then the twilight falls, adding its sadness to my anxiety.

I must land. Without shutting down the engine I descend through the curtain of white fog which hides the ground.

As soon as I have pierced the veil of mist the ground appears indistinctly; immediately I perceive the glow of long flames and the flash of the lightning caused by explosions. Little clouds of smoke race in the wind followed by the explosions of shrapnel. It is the battle! I push my engine to its full power and try to turn com-

pletely around when I see a great enemy biplane making straight for me. The turn completed, I have lost sight of the enemy but it is then that the irreparable happens amidst a storm of noise! The machine plunges forward; the wind has broken the left wing; the controls are slack, and, in spite of all my struggles, the plane is tossed about, pitches forward, and then falls.

It has come!

The earth mounts toward me dizzily. And at once the dreadful thought of the plane catching fire comes to me while I utter something like:

"No, not *that*! Oh! not *that*!"

With inconceivable rapidity I shut down the engine and, taking one hand off the control lever, I try to unfasten the straps which tie me to my machine, but I come to the ground before I have had time to do so; first the propeller smashes and immediately it is an undescribable confusion of motions and noises. The straps around me seem cruelly tight, then they break, and I fall in a heap in an entanglement of pieces, feeling as if I were still madly rushing through space.

In spite of all this confusion and stupour, obeying an imperious instinct, I do my best to extricate myself from the broken wires.

And then I hear a strong voice crying:

"In the name of heaven crouch down!—you are being fired on!"

At that minute only I realize that the battle is raging around me and that the earth is trembling with continuous explosions.

A few steps away is a shallow drill in which I let myself roll. An extraordinary feeling of peace at once fills my brain although my heart beats fast.

I am lying with my face turned toward the sky. My eyes grow suddenly dim; a gluey sweat sticks to my face. When I touch it, I feel the torn flesh and my hand is covered with blood.

Mechanically I try to lift myself on one elbow, but at the same moment I hear the noise of a flattened bullet making a ricochet, amidst a sheaf of sparks, on the stone which protects my head. I fall back motionless at the bottom of the drill feeling more and more dizzy with the impression that I am gradually losing consciousness.

Then comes the coma and I have no idea how long it lasted.

One by one the sensations reach me through my swoon. At first they are vague and fleeting as in a dream. Little by little they become more intense and more frequent and I am at last once more aware of my surroundings.

When I open my eyes the tumult of the battle

seems farther off; and the machine guns appear to have slackened their firing.

Muffled voices reach me. I feel that I am being pulled by the feet; then, that I am falling limply at the bottom of a hole. Four or five soldiers are around me and regard me with compassion.

I have now regained consciousness but an incredible stupour overwhelms me, which prevents any kind of movement or speech. Although the soldiers' voices sound feeble, far away, and without any ring, I can understand what they say—perfectly. It is:

"Well, he's in a pretty condition! He is not done for but his 'likeness' is certainly spoiled!" Then someone who is out of sight cries: "Have you got the aviator?"

"Yes, my lieutenant," answers a soldier.

"In what condition is he?"

"Impossible to tell, his face is covered with blood and he doesn't move but I believe he looks at us."

"Take him to the post."

"Impossible! The enemy is firing a barrage of the asphyxiating kind behind us; a mole couldn't pass."

The voice then adds without any trace of emotion:

"Well bring him to the captain's dug-out."

The men take hold of me very gently and start through the *boyaux*. It becomes more and more dark and above our heads we still hear the noise like the tearing of canvas and the growling of innumerable projectiles. Suddenly the men throw me against the earthen wall and flatten themselves down in the corner. Almost at once a shell bursts above our heads and a lot of earth and stones roll down.

The shock causes me to stand up, which greatly astonishes the friends who are carrying me through a labyrinth of *boyaux* and trenches.

Now I am in front of a gray-haired man who is smoking his pipe, leaning against a heap of sand bags, his cap tied under his chin with a wide checked handkerchief. His face is peaceful and merry. It is the captain.

He is there, extraordinarily calm, going from the periscope to the telephone like a good old man hurrying his workmen through a banal task. He extends his hand with a kind smile:

"You had an awful tumble." Then he looks at me sideways, adding: "I made sure you were done for."

Just at that minute a disabled German biplane comes to the ground in an oblique fall. The captain promptly orders fire and at once a

thunder of musketry is heard all around us—fired by some ambushed soldiers.

The machine falls—passing a few metres from our heads. There are three men on board, two of them are dead and their shoulders lie across the rigging. The pilot manœuvres desperately to land toward his lines.

Looking through the periscope I see the biplane, jagged by the storm of bullets, land in front of our barbed-wire entanglement and take fire at once with a great dull noise. It seems to me as if I had heard a desperate cry and seen a human shape try to jump out of the fire and fall back in it.

I am nervously exhausted and once more seized with nausea. I realize that I am being looked after and made to lie down on an earthen bench in a notch in the wall of the trench. The paternal captain wraps a blanket around my legs and places a straw pillow behind my back and I fall once more into forgetfulness.

It seems to me it has lasted very long. In my feverish sleep the same nightmare keeps coming back. An inhuman voice issues from a fire howling: "Not *that!* Oh! not *that!*"

Suddenly a dreadful shock makes me jump, as some of the earthen wall tumbles down. A voice speaks through the gloom saying:

"It is the mine."

At the same time a small electric lamp is lighted and I see the captain lying on the other bench wrapped up in blankets, a serviette tied around his head.

The noise of the battle has quieted; outside the calm is surprising and in our hole one has an impression of security and well-being.

The captain gives me a drink and explains that, the —th company having dug a temporary shelter in front of our lines, it is only necessary for us to wait until we are relieved—which will not be possible until the communications cut by the bombardment have been reëstablished.

Having said that, he puts the lamp out and goes to sleep.

There is no more noise—only the occasional crackling of a solitary rifle or the dull buzz of the artillery lost in the distance.

At last comes the relieving party. I feel my eyes close again—but, this time, for real sleep.

THE END.

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